NATION

ULFA(I) attacks Assam Police camp, 4 injured

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BUSINESS

India urea plants at half capacity amid LNG crisis

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SPORTS

Anahat crowned Indian Open 2026 champion

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Hormuz is only closed to enemies: Iran

Trump threatens to bomb Iran's energy infra, Tehran says do that & Hormuz won't open

LONDON, 22 MARCH

Iran repeated that the Strait of Hormuz is closed only to its enemies, as US President Donald Trump gave Tehran a 48-hour deadline to open the crucial water or face attacks on its energy infrastructure.

Iran's representative to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Ali Mousavi has clarified that foreign vessels may continue to navigate the Strait of Hormuz, provided they coordinate with the Iranian government for security and safety arrangements. Mousavi, who is also Iran's envoy to the UK said that Iran is ready to cooperate with the IMO and various nations to enhance maritime safety protocols and ensure the protection of seafarers.

"Strait of Hormuz is only closed to Iran's enemies," he said.

Approximately 20 per cent of the world's seafaring oil and gas used to pass through the Strait, but Iran had effectively shut it following the Israeli-US attacks on February, sending oil and gas prices spiralling.

Trump, however, posted on Truth Social that he will bomb Iran's energy infrastructure if the Strait was not opened to everyone.

Trump said if Iran didn't open the Strait, the US would destroy its "various power plants, starting with the biggest one first!"

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf responded on X that if Iran's power plants are targeted, then vital infrastructure -- including energy and desalination facilities -- would be considered legitimate targets and "irreversibly destroyed".

Iran also said that it will close the Strait if Trump attacked its energy infrastructure.

Trump had earlier hinted at "winding down" operations.

WEST ASIA WAR DAY-23

HUNDREDS WOUNDED IN 'LITTLE INDIA'

At least 175 people were injured in Israel's Dimona and Arad on Saturday by Iranian strikes. Tehran said it was responding to Israel's bombardment of the nuclear enrichment site in Natanz in Iran, by striking cities close to Negev Desert, which is Israel's nuclear enrichment site. Israel denies having a nuclear bomb.

Notably, Dimona about 20 km west of the nuclear research centre, is known as "Little India," housing some 7,500 Indian-Jewish people.

—Agencies

>>>More on Page 6

CLOSURE OF HORMUZ UPENDS GLOBAL ECONOMY

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has shocked the global economy, and the longer the conflict continues, the worse the ramifications become. Here's a look at what's happened so far:

45% increase in oil price since late Feb

35% increase in fertiliser price

55% increase in gas price

- Regional inflation could rise by 4.6% in 2026, up from 3.5% in 2025.
- Asia-Pacific economies could slow to around 4.0% in 2026, down from 4.6% in 2025.
- 45 million people could face extreme levels of hunger if the war continues and the price of fuel continues to climb.

SOURCE: UN

Modi takes stock of fuel, power supply

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday in a meeting with ministers reviewed the situation related to crude, gas and other petroleum products, and power and fertiliser sectors in view of the evolving West Asia situation. The focus of the meeting was on ensuring uninterrupted supply, stable logistics and efficient distribution across the country.

Union Ministers Rajnath Singh (Defence), Amit Shah (Home), Shivraj Singh Chouhan (Agriculture), S Jaishankar (External Affairs), Nirmala Sitharaman (Finance), JP Nadda (Health), Piyush Goyal (Commerce and Industry), Ashwini Vaishnaw (Railways), Sarbananda Sonowal (Ports and Shipping), Manohar Lal Khattar (Power), Pralhad Joshi (Food and Consumer Affairs), Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu (Civil Aviation) Hardeep Singh Puri (Petroleum) and NSA Ajit Doval were among those who attended, sources said.

Earlier, the Centre asked city gas distribution companies to prioritise piped natural gas (PNG) connections for commercial establishments and allowed another 20 per cent allocation of commercial LPG to States, which would take overall allocation to 50 per cent. *—PTI*

—MOHAMMED ASAD

LPG ship from US docks in M'luru

An LPG cargo ship called the "Pyxis Pioneer", from the US arrived, at the New Mangalore Port on Sunday bringing 16,714 metric tonnes of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) for discharge to Aegis Logistics, officials said. *>>>MORE ON PAGE 2*

Congress names candidates for two bypolls

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

The Congress on Sunday announced Umesh Meti and Samarth Mallikarjun as candidates for bypolls in Bagalkot and Davangere South in Karnataka following deaths of MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa. Umesh is Meti's son, while Samarth is the grandson of Shivashankarappa. The decision triggered disgruntlement with Sadiq Pailwan saying he will contest as a rebel. The BJP has named Veerabhadrayya Charantimath and Srinivas T Dasakariyappa. "Considering the development work done by Shivashankarappa for Davangere and the family's loyalty to Congress, the party has made a decision considering all factors," said DK Shivakumar. Elections will be held on April. *—PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 2

Police stop youth from storming Kuki leader's home

CHURACHANDPUR, 22 MARCH

A group of youths attempted to storm the residence of Kuki Zo Council chairman H Thanglet in Churachandpur district of Manipur on Sunday, but security forces thwarted the move by firing tear gas shells, officials said. The incident came a day after Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh held talks with the Kuki Zo Council in Guwahati to rebuild trust between Meiteis and Kukis. More than 260 people have been killed since May 2023. A large number of youths threw stones and tried to enter the premises but were dispersed as tension remained high and forces deployed in the area. *—PTI*

Financial impact of war yet to be fully felt: AI CEO tells staff

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The Air India Group has been significantly impacted by the West Asia conflict and the financial impact is "yet to be fully felt", according to Air India CEO Campbell Wilson.

Although the spot price of jet fuel has more than doubled, most of the financial impact will only hit the group from next month, he said in a message to the staff on Friday.

- Although the spot price of jet fuel has more than doubled, most of the financial impact will only hit the group from next month, CEO Wilson said

Loss-making Air India and Air India Express have been grappling with disruptions like other airlines.

"In the three weeks since the conflict started, we have had to cancel around 2,500 flights to the region. We can operate only around 30 per cent of our normal Middle East schedule because airports or airspace are closed," he said. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

Six killed in accidents in Devanahalli, KR Puram

BENGALURU, MARCH 22:

Six people, including three women from a Stree Shakti group, were killed in two separate road accidents that occurred on the outskirts of the city last night.

A group of 12 women from Gudugondanahalli in Tiptur, part of a Stree Shakti self-help group, were travelling in a TT vehicle to Kempegowda International Airport for a pilgrimage to Kashi. They were scheduled to board a flight, with transport arranged for the airport drop-off.

Three of the women—Jayamma (60), Yashodamma (60), and Ganga (38) from Tiptur taluk—were killed near Devanahalli's Rani Cross when a lorry hit their vehicle. The crash occurred after the driver missed a turn and attempted a U-turn, leaving the vehicle's left side completely crushed.

Several others were injured and admitted to a private hospital in Devanahalli. One of whom — Kempamma — who sustained critical injuries, has been shifted to Victoria Hospital in Bengaluru for treatment.

Meanwhile, three men—Manikantha, Suresh, and Srinivas from Whitefield—died on the Medahalli flyover in KR Puram when a goods auto carrying potatoes from Kolar crashed into a canter truck halted on the flyover due to a tyre burst. *—Salar News*

Big city sewers have antiobiotic resistant bacteria

HYDERABAD, 22 MARCH

Researchers from the CSIR–CCMB along with partner institutions, uncovered widespread patterns of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) genes in bacteria across major Indian cities, offering new insights into a growing global health threat.

Antimicrobial resistance occurs when bacteria evolve mechanisms to survive drugs designed to kill them, such as antibiotics. This phenomenon is already responsible for millions of deaths worldwide each year and poses a serious challenge to modern medicine, a press release from the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) said.

In one of the most comprehensive studies of its kind in India, the findings, published in Nature Communications, provide the first large-scale map of AMR genes in urban wastewater.

The study analysed 447 wastewater samples collected between March 2022 and March 2024 from 19 sites across four major metropolitan cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai.

Using advanced "shotgun metagenomics" techniques, researchers examined bacterial genetic material to understand how resistance develops and spreads.

The researchers propose using wastewater-based pathogen surveillance more widely in the country. *—PTI*

Ex-high commissioner to India Abdul Basit *—PTI*

Will bomb Delhi, Mumbai if US hits: Pak ex-envoy

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Former Pakistan high commissioner to India Abdul Basit's said that if the US attacks his nation's nuclear facilities, then Islamabad would bomb Mumbai and Delhi. Basit was quick to add that he only painting a "worst case scenario".

"If America attacks Pakistan we have to attack India, Mumbai, New Delhi, without a second thought. We won't leave it we'll see what happens later," he said. The comments come after the US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal poses a threat to the US.

"If someone sees us with a bad eye Pakistan will have no other option than to attack India wherever it wants," Basit added. "We don't want that to happen India doesn't want that either."

Basit served as Pakistan's high-ranking diplomat in New Delhi from 2014 to 2017, when the relations between India and Pakistan were not at their best. *—Agencies*

Activists said there was a wetland emergency as flamingos haven't come to the DPS, NRI, and T

TOXIC WETLANDS IN NAVI MUMBAI ENDANGER FLAMINGO HABITAT

MUMBAI, 22 MARCH

Climate activists have sounded a 'wetland emergency', as three key flamingo habitats in Navi Mumbai have turned toxic, with tests of water samples revealing alarming results.

Activists flagged the deteriorating condition of the DPS, NRI, and T Chanakya lakes at Nerul, which serve as satellite wetlands for the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS), a Ramsar site.

Flamingo season in Navi Mumbai is from November to May, with January to March seen as the peak viewing time, as bird lovers and enthusiasts gather at wetlands to catch a glimpse of the pink parade.

Water sample tests commissioned by the NatConnect Foundation indicate a system under severe stress, activists have stated in messages sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

The warning is reinforced by the absence of flamingos, which have not arrived this season, said B Kumar, director of NatConnect Foundation.

Four basic indicators — TDS, pH, BOD and COD — paint a consistent picture of decline.

The results showed over-concentrated, stagnant water rather than natural tidal flushing. *—PTI*

BREAKS CHAMLING'S RECORD

Modi becomes longest serving head of govt

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the longest serving head of government, surpassing former Sikkim chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling. Modi has now served 8,931 days in public life, first as the Gujarat chief minister and now as the Prime Minister.

Union ministers, including Amit Shah, JP Nadda, Piyush Goyal, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and BJP Chief Nitin Nabin hailed the prime minister, saying the "Modi era" has transformed India unrecognisably in setting new landmarks in development.

Singh praised Modi on X, saying his life has been a continuous journey of service -- from his unwavering commitment as the Gujarat CM and his dedicated leadership as the PM.

"This moment reflects his deep commitment to nation-first governance, integrity in action, and tireless service to every citizen," he wrote.

Shah said Modi's decades of 'seva' (service) have shaped an era of his own.

"Whether it is giving the poor their rights, setting new landmarks in development or enhancing the nation's pride on global platforms, the Modi era has transformed India unrecognisably," he said on X.

Shah said that Modi hadn't taken a holiday in more than 24 years – a testament to his dedication. *—PTI*

A tenure unlike any other

- Longest serving CM of Gujarat, with his term spanning from October 2001 to May 2014.
- The tenure was briefly marred by the infamous 2002 Gujarat riots, although the extent of his involvement is unclear.
- Third longest serving PM of India, after Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Modi was sworn in as PM on 26 May, 2014 and has held the office in the two subsequent elections of 2019 and 2024.

—PTI

—PTI

Chikkaballapur books 82 gambling cases during Ugadi

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 22 MARCH

Chikkaballapur police booked 82 gambling cases and arrested around 475 people during two days of Ugadi festivities in district, despite heightened enforcement. Authorities seized nearly Rs 6 lakh in stake money. Gambling is a common practice in rural areas during Ugadi, especially in villages bordering Andhra Pradesh. Activities typically intensify the following day, locally called "vassha todaku", when celebrations peak with non-vegetarian food and liquor consumption. Bagepalli and Gowribidanur police stations reported the highest number of cases, with 15 combined, followed by nine cases in Manchenahalli. Superintendent of Police Kushal Chouskey said police had made elaborate arrangements to curb such activities, adding that strict action would continue against offenders.

-SALAR NEWS

Retired IAS officer slams USCIRF report on RSS

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Retired IAS officer M Madan Gopal has criticised the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), claiming it targets India deliberately to weaken the country from within. He stated that its vice-chairman is a Pakistani American, and another member is a Sharia scholar educated in Pakistan, asserting they have an anti-India agenda. Gopal said, "They are targeting India because India is growing strong economically and socially, and USCIRF wants to weaken the structure within the country." Former Jammu and Kashmir DGP SP Vaid also criticised the report, questioning the background of USCIRF members. The USCIRF report called for sanctions against RSS and RAW, which the signatories dismissed as "disturbing and completely off the mark."—*ANI*

'The Art Park' holds interactive event in Mysuru

MYSURU, 22 MARCH

The Bengaluru-based art initiative, The Art Park, held its interactive event 'Meet the Artists' at Heritage House in Mysuru on Sunday. Launched in 2014 by eminent artist SG Vasudev in Bengaluru, the initiative aims to bridge the gap between artists and the public by making art more accessible and interactive. Organised in association with Bharath Hospital and Institute of Oncology, the event featured live art demonstrations, exhibitions, and interactive sessions. The programme brought together over 30 renowned award-winning artists budding artists including Raghavendra, Gururaj Nayak, Raghavendra K, Yoganand, Vijaya Rao, Vichar, Manjunath (CAVA Alumni Association President), Surya (Secretary of CAVA Alumni Association), SN Siddaram and Venugopal were also present. V Prakash, former CFTRI Director was also present. *-SALAR NEWS*

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US LPG cargo ship arrives at New Mangalore Port

Brings 16,714 MT of LPG after Russian ship came from China

MANGALURU, 22 MARCH

An LPG cargo ship from the US arrived at the New Mangalore Port on Sunday, amid the supply constraints due to the ongoing war in West Asia.

The vessel "Pyxis Pioneer", which left Port of Nederland in Texas on 14 February, brought 16,714 metric tonnes of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) for discharge to Aegis Logistics, officials said.

The development is considered significant as Mangaluru is home to India's largest underground LPG storage facility, which became operational in September 2025. The storage facility, located 225 metres below sea level, has a capacity of 80,000 metric tonnes.

Pyxis Pioneer, which left Port of Nederland in Texas, brought 16,714 metric tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas at New Mangalore Port —*PTI*

The vessel follows the Russian **'Aqua Titan'** ship in reaching the port within the span of a day. "Aqua Titan", originally headed to China, was diverted to India a few days ago. The ship arrived off the Mangaluru coast on Saturday evening carrying 7.7 lakh barrels of crude oil.

The crude is reportedly being unloaded via an offshore pipeline connected to a jetty 12 nautical miles from the shore to the Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL).

On Friday, the Shipping Ministry informed that New Mangalore Port has waived cargo-related charges for crude oil and LPG from 14 to 31 March. It also said that there is no congestion reported at any port. The de facto closure of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil passes through, has sent oil and gas prices spiralling. —*PTI*

EID MUBARAK

Muslims take part in a special Eid ul-Fitr prayer at an Eidgah Maidan on Mysuru Road; Chief Minister Siddaramaiah celebrated Eid at Quddus Saheb Eidgah on Millers Road; AICC General Secretary Mansoor Ali Khan celebrates with his children—*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Army officer dies of 'heart attack' while swimming

BELAGAVI, 22 MARCH

- The incident occurred on Saturday evening when Lieutenant Amit Singh from Haryana was undergoing training

An Army officer died of a suspected heart attack while swimming at the Commando Wing campus in Nanawadi, Belagavi, officials said.

The incident occurred on Saturday evening when Lieutenant Amit Singh, a native of Haryana, was undergoing training at the MLIRC (Maratha Light Infantry Regimental Centre) Commando Wing. He reportedly suffered a severe cardiac arrest while swimming in the pool.

Belagavi police commissioner Bhushan Borase confirmed the incident saying Singh had completed two laps before showing signs of exhaustion. "During his third lap, he collapsed in the water. Lifeguard Pradeep Kumar pulled him out and administered first aid," the commissioner said. He was rushed to the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences (BIMS) Hospital by ambulance, but was declared dead en route, Commissioner Borase said, adding that preliminary reports indicate death due to cardiac arrest. The case falls under the jurisdiction of Tilakwadi Police Station, Belagavi. —*PTI*

Alipura celebrates Ramadan modestly

ALIPURA, 22 MARCH

This Shia dominated village in Gauribidanuru taluk of Chikkaballapura taluk observed Ramadan festival in a modest way due to the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, former supreme leader of Iran.

Muslims in the village of Alipura took out a huge procession in the village before congregating at the Idgah Maidan where they conducted prayers. People wore black bands on their hands to express their sorrow over the demise of Khamenei. Huge portraits of Khamenei were placed at various places in the village with people offering floral tributes to him.

Zahid Abbas, businessman in the village said that the entire village has great respect for Khamenei. Although Ramadan was to be celebrated with fervour and in a grand manner, the villagers felt it to celebrate the festival in a modest way, he said noting that Khamenei had previously visited the village forty years back when he was on a tour of Kashmir.

Abbas said many students from the village are pursuing their education in Iran and many had returned home following the Iran conflict and would return back once the situation eases. —*Salar News*

'DOESN'T WORK ARBITRARILY'

Collegium system best for India, for now: Gavai

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

Former CJI Justice BR Gavai on Sunday said that the collegium system, at least for the time being, is the best for India.

He also stressed that the government should seriously consider the national litigation policy.

He was speaking at the valedictory session of the Supreme Court Bar Association's (SCBA) first National Conference -2026 titled "Reimagining Judicial Governance: Strengthening Institutions for Democratic Justice."

He said the collegium doesn't work arbitrarily. The names of the judges are recommended by the Chief Justice of the High Court and the collegium of the two most senior judges, and thereafter, it goes to the Centre.

"The inputs of the Centre, the Intelligence and everybody are gathered, and thereafter, the Supreme Court Collegium takes a final decision. And even after the names are sent, if the government, the executive have any issues, those issues are addressed to the collegium. The collegium considers those issues, and thereafter, it takes a final call," he added.

Speaking about the huge gap between the sanctioned strength and the number of appointments of the high court judges, the former CJI said, the judgement of the Supreme Court, on more than one occasion, has stated that, on the second reiteration, by the collegium, the executive is bound to make the appointment.

Stating that as a judge he has always been in favour of maintaining a balance between the protection of the environment and development, he said that courts do not interfere in environmental matters without reason. Earlier, CJI Justice Surya Kant said that AI must be integrated into the judicial system in a manner that strengthens the institution. — *PTI*

Umesh Meti; Samrat Mallikarjun —*PTI*

Cong fields Umesh, Samrath for bypolls

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

After several rounds of discussion amid stiff competition for the party tickets, Congress on Sunday announced Umesh Meti and Samarth Mallikarjun as the party candidates for Assembly by-polls to Bagalkot and Davangere South assembly constituencies, the son and grandson of the respective deceased legislators.

Bypolls for the Bagalkot and Davanagere South Assembly constituencies were necessitated following the deaths of Congress MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa, respectively.

Samarth's father, SS Mallikarjun, is a Minister in the Siddaramaiah-led Cabinet and is in charge of Davangere district, while his mother, Prabha Mallikarjun, is a Member of Parliament from the region.

Following the approval of its Central Election Committee, the BJP has already announced Veerabhadrayya Charantimath from Bagalkot and Srinivas T Dasakariyappa from Davangere South as candidates.

The last date for filing nominations is 23 March, and elections will be held on 9 April.

END TO THE TURMOIL?

AICC General Secretary in charge of Karnataka, Randeep Singh Surjewala, held a series of discussions in Bengaluru, including with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Deputy DK Shivakumar, who is also the party President in the State regarding the bypolls.

The meetings proceeded even as ticket aspirants Samarth and Sadiq Pailwan filed their nominations from the Davangere South Assembly constituencies on Friday, despite the party not having officially announced the candidates.

Notably, Samarth's brothers and sister had announced their intentions to contest the seat, and even floated the idea of standing as independent candidates, until Siddaramaiah-brokered agreement.

Similarly, for the Davangere South seat, there was a strong demand from Muslims for the ticket, as the community has a significant presence in the segment. Some factions within Congress also opposed giving the ticket to the Shamanur family. —*PTI*

Suspended Moodbidri cop accused of rape

MANGALURU, 22 MARCH

Another woman has filed a complaint of rape against an inspector of the Moodbidri Police Station, who was recently suspended in Beltangadi taluk in Mangaluru. Three women had earlier accused him of sexual harassment.

In her complaint, the survivor, who is a teacher has alleged that the accused, Sandesh BG, had subjected her to repeated sexual assault between 2018 and 2023, under threat and coercion.

She stated that the accused would visit her residence and raped her and threatened her of dire consequences if she dared to raise her voice against him.

The woman eventually registered her complaint in the Vennuru Police Station on 21 March.

The police officer had been suspended from his services after three women filed separate complaints against him before the State Chief Minister, Home Minister, chief secretary and the Karnataka State Commission for Women. Police have registered a case against the accused and are conducting an investigation. —*Salar News*

VIOLATION OF AGREEMENT

KIADB asks Embassy to surrender 78 acres of land

BENGALURU, 22 MARCH

The Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) has ordered the resumption of approximately 78 acres of land in Bengaluru, held by Embassy Developments Ltd's subsidiary, Embassy East Business Park Ltd (EEBPL). The order, dated 16 March 2026, directs EEBPL to surrender possession within 30 days, received on 17 March. The land is under a Lease-cum-Sale Agreement (LCSA) valid until June 2029, but KIADB has initiated action under Section 34B of the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Act, 1966, citing alleged breaches of agreement terms.

The violations involve execution of agreements with third parties without KIADB's prior approval, relating to portions of the land. EEBPL has denied these allegations, stating sub-lease arrangements were made with no-objection certificates from KIADB, and that agreements to sell do not transfer property interest, being executed with necessary approvals.

The company claims the order violates principles of natural justice, alleging its prior communications were ignored. It is evaluating legal remedies, including approaching the Karnataka High Court, and assessing the financial and operational impact. This development is notable given recent status quo relief secured by Embassy Developments against coercive steps in two ED cases, highlighting ongoing regulatory challenges. —*PTI*

DRI seizes drugs worth Rs 8.3 crore; 3 arrested in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, MARCH 22

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) seized 8.3 kg of a psychotropic substance worth Rs 8.3 crore and arrested three people in Bengaluru.

Acting on specific intelligence, officials intercepted a 26-year-old passenger from Mizoram on arrival from New Delhi at KSR Railway Station. Examination of his baggage led to the recovery of the substance suspected to be methamphetamine hydrochloride, commonly known as crystal meth.

Subsequent investigation led to the arrest of two more local residents at different locations in the City. Searches also resulted in the seizure of around 200 SIM cards, 45 debit and credit cards, and multiple mobile phones.

The contraband falls under commercial quantity as per the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985. Further probe is underway. —*PTI*

Birds have a drink of water at a dried-up Bengaluru lake. World Water Day was observed on Sunday as the globe tried to safeguard its water resources, vital for food security and to sustain life itself —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

—ANI

Former JD(U) leader KC Tyagi joins RLD

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Former JD(U) leader KC Tyagi has joined the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), stating there is no difference as both parties follow the ideals of Chaudhary Charan Singh and Ram Manohar Lohia. Tyagi said he joined not to become an MLA or MP but to see Jayant Chaudhary emulate Charan Singh. He vowed to carry forward Charan Singh's vision during his time in RLD, which is allied with the BJP and part of NDA. Tyagi, who served JD(U) since 2003, was welcomed by party president Jayant Chaudhary, who said he would bring "new energy and strength" to the party. Tyagi expressed his aim to strengthen issues left by Charan Singh for a prosperous India. —*PTI*

Andhra MLA loses Rs 12 lakh in cyber fraud

POLAVARAM, 22 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh police have registered a cyber fraud case after Janasena MLA C Balaraju lost Rs 12 lakh by clicking on a malicious APK file. The incident occurred on 6 March when the legislator accessed a fraudulent link, leading to unauthorised transactions from his bank account. Balaraju approached the Cyber Crime Helpline and filed a complaint, with police registering a case under Sections 318(4) BNS and 66 D of the IT Act. The funds were traced to an ATM in West Bengal, and police suspect organised gang involvement with possible international links. —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

J&K LG thanks PM, Singh for releasing fisheries fund

JAMMU, 21 MARCH

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh for releasing Rs 111.66 crore Central funds for fisheries development. Sinha thanked them for the support to strengthen the fisheries sector in the Union Territory. He said, "The ministry released a 'mother sanction' of Rs 10 crore this financial year, with further assistance promised once utilised." Sinha added that the Indian government assured additional Central funds after the initial amount is used, demonstrating its commitment to improving fish farmers' livelihoods and welfare. —*PTI*

DMK's ally exits alliance ahead of TN elections

Velmurugan objects to the ruling party's 'big brother' attitude

CHENNAI, 22 MARCH

Ahead of the 23 April Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, Tamilaga Vazhvurimai Katchi on Sunday announced quitting the DMK-led SPA, with its founder T Velmurugan objecting to the ruling party's "big brother" attitude.

The decision was taken also following his party being "ignored," Velmurugan, incumbent MLA from Panruti (Cuddalore dt) Assembly segment, told reporters here.

"We were told during seat-sharing negotiations that we will be allotted one seat for the Assembly polls. We have been raising a set of demands, including regarding social justice. We were told when other parties are not asking for any demands, why you are making such demands," Velmurugan said.

"I have been repeatedly asking the government to fulfil at least some of the demands. But the DMK has been ignoring it," he claimed.

MK Stalin; T Velmurugan —*WIKIPEDIA*

On his further course of action, he said that his organisation would not join the NDA in Tamil Nadu and indicated that he was talking to some parties over allying.

Further, "we have been making charter of demands to the negotiation panel (of the DMK). I have been informing that there was not any problem on allocation of seats but immediately take steps to fulfil these demands," he said.

Recalling that he has been speaking about the same demands in the legislative assembly for several years, Velmurugan alleged that "the DMK-led government did not care about them."

During seat-sharing negotiations, Velmurugan claimed, the approach of the election panel of the DMK was like a "big brother".

"We were told that when political parties including Congress, Communists, and MDMK did not place any such demands, as a legislator and the representative of a small party, they did not deem it fit for us to give such demands and ask them to be fulfilled. "

"Treating us like this is not acceptable", Velmurugan added.

Meanwhile, DMK has offered five seats to its ally, CPI (M), for the forthcoming Assembly polls, the Left party's State Secretary P Shanmugam said on Sunday. —*PTI*

Puducherry ex-minister resigns from BJP

PUDUCHERRY/ NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

BJP functionary and a former minister in the AINRC-led coalition government, AK Sai J Saravanankumar has quit the national party, days after being denied a poll ticket to contest the 9 April Assembly elections.

He said he has resigned from the party's primary membership and all responsibilities. He blamed local party leaders for his move.

Kumar told PTI that he has sent his letter of resignation on Saturday to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP national president Nitin Nabin, among others.

In the letter, a copy of which was distributed to media persons, he said he had no regrets towards the party or its national leaders.

"The reason for resignation is the hostility that those in key positions of the party in Puducherry have shown towards me," he said.

Kumar also stated in his letter that he knew who worked against him "to prevent a person belonging to a lower caste from advancing in the party."

Meanwhile, BJP on Sunday named one more candidate for the Assembly polls in Puducherry, fielding M Arulmurugan from Karaikal South.

On Saturday, the BJP had released a list of nine candidates for the polls.

The ruling AINRC and the BJP-AIADMK combine on Friday reached an agreement for the Assembly polls in the Union territory. —*PTI*

Himanta, Assam BJP Chief reach out to rebel leaders

GUWAHATI, 22 MARCH

Several sitting MLAs and aspirants, who have been deprived of BJP tickets for the 9 April Assam assembly polls, have threatened to contest as Independents, with Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma** and state party chief Dilip Saikia reaching out to them to calm their ire, sources said.

The recent induction of Congress leaders Pradyut Bordoloi and Bhupen Borah into the BJP and their subsequent nomination as party candidates for Dispur and Bihpuria assembly constituencies, respectively, has raised the hackles of many ticket aspirants in the party.

The most vocal protest has been in Dispur constituency,

where senior party leader Jayanta Das was a highly probable candidate before Bordoloi jumped into the scene.

Das openly revolted against Sarma, accusing him of making the party a "Congress BJP" by bringing in his close associates from the grand old party and ignoring the old timers.

The party also denied a ticket to sitting MLA and veteran politician Atul Bora.

Meanwhile, the TMC on Sunday announced its second list of candidates for Assam Assembly elections, naming Congress MLA Sherman Ali Ahmed from Mandia constituency while withdrawing the candidature of the party's state senior vice-president Dulu Ahmed.

The latest list has named seven party candidates, while the first one had 11 nominees.

Additionally, Raijor Dal has announced its revised, final list of candidates for Assam Assembly elections, cancelling its nominees from three constituencies after entering into an Opposition alliance in the state and agreeing to a seat-sharing arrangement as part of it. —*PTI*

JOB LETTERS TO NURSES

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday distributed job letters to 1,228 nursing professionals, 131 of them men, at the Lok Bhavan in Lucknow. Yogi said that today, there is a high demand for Indian nursing professionals, not only in the country, but across the world —*ANI*

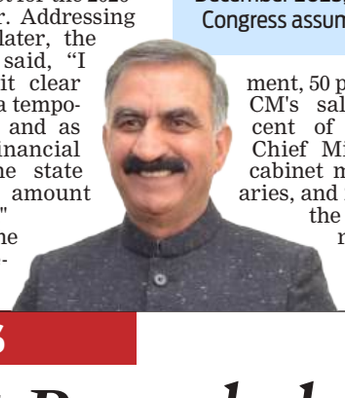
Himachal Pradesh govt defers salaries of officials due to debt

SHIMLA, 22 MARCH

Faced with a severe financial crunch and the discontinuation of the revenue deficit grant, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister **Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu** on Saturday announced a temporary deferment of a portion of salaries for himself, ministers, MLAs and senior officials.

The announcement was made during the presentation of the state budget for the 2026-27 financial year. Addressing media persons later, the Chief Minister said, "I want to make it clear that this is only a temporary deferment, and as soon as the financial condition of the state improves, this amount will be returned."

According to the budget statement, 50 per cent of the CM's salary, 30 per cent of the Deputy Chief Minister's and cabinet ministers' salaries, and 20 per cent of the MLAs' salaries will be deferred for the next six months. The deferment also extends to political appointees and top-tier bureaucracy. A 20 per cent cut will apply to the salaries of all Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Deputy Chairman of commissions, boards and corporations and all advisors. —*PTI*



'T'GANA'S DEBT AT ₹8L CR AS ON 2025'

Telangana's total debt, including that of its entities and government guarantees, stood at Rs 8 lakh crore as of December 2025, according to the Socio-Economic Outlook 2026 released by the state government. The state government said that from December 2023, when Congress assumed power, to the same month in 2025, the total borrowings of the state and its entities amounted to Rs 3,19,179 crore, with repayments (principal and interest) of Rs 3,04,202 crore. Over the same period, repayments amounting to Rs 3.04 lakh crore were made towards principal and interest. —*PTI*

DOWNPLAYS DISSENT

LDF eyeing 110 seats in Kerala polls: CPI(M)

KANNUR/ MALAPPURAM/ KOLLAM/T'PURAM, 22 MARCH

CPI(M) state Secretary **MV Govindan** on Sunday said that party dissidents would not affect the ruling Left Front's prospects in the upcoming Assembly elections, asserting that the number of defectors is "insignificant".

Govindan told reporters the handful of leaders who left the party would have no impact on the 9 April polls and said the ruling LDF targeted 110 seats in the upcoming polls. Four senior leaders, including G Sudhakaran, are facing the elections as rebel independents.

"We have 5.5 lakh members in Kerala and around 2.5 lakh sympathisers. Out of this, if five or six persons leave due to wrong tendencies, can it be said that they are leading a communist movement?" he asked.

He maintained that, unlike the Congress, there was no internal discord within the CPI(M).

Meanwhile, in a notable political shift ahead of the 9 April assembly elections in Kerala, former Left-backed independent MLA Karat Razack on Sunday reunited with the IUML in Malappuram after parting ways with the ruling LDF.

In another development, Kollam MP and senior RSP leader NK Premachandran has accused the ruling CPI(M) of having an electoral understanding with the BJP in 30 constituencies across the state, but asserted that Opposition UDF will overcome any such "unholy nexus" to emerge victorious in the hustings. RSP is a part of the Congress-led UDF.

In Thiruvananthapuram, CPI(M) leader Smitha Sundaresan also joined the BJP, alleging erosion of values in her former party. —*PTI*

'Act against BJP candidate's Hindu MLA comment'

A controversy has erupted in poll-bound Kerala over an alleged communal remark made by BJP candidate in Guruvayur constituency, **B Gopalakrishnan**, in his campaign video, with the ruling CPI(M) and Opposition Congress approaching the Election Commission seeking action against him.

The row pertains to a campaign video in which Gopalakrishnan purportedly claimed that Guruvayur constituency had not elected a Hindu MLA for nearly five decades and alleged that both the Left and the Congress-led fronts had not been fielding candidates from the community. —*PTI*

POLL PREPARATIONS

EC steps up security measures in West Bengal ahead of elections

KOLKATA, 22 MARCH

Senior police officials began visiting police stations across West Bengal from Sunday as the Election Commission stepped up monitoring of poll preparedness and security arrangements in the poll-bound state.

During these visits, officers in charge of police stations are being briefed on measures needed to be taken for holding free and fair polling.

In line with directives from the poll panel, police commissioners and superintendents of police have started visiting police stations to review law and order arrangements ahead of the ensuing elections, an official from the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer's office said.

Police authorities are also expected to send out a strong message on maintaining an environment free of fear and violence.

Polling for the 294-member West Bengal Assembly is slated on 23 and 29 April, while the counting of votes will be held on 4 May.

Officers inspecting the items inside a vehicle during security checks —*ANI*

Additionally, the West Bengal government has directed all the district magistrates to take precautionary measures for maintaining law and order during the publication of the supplementary electoral rolls on 23 March.

CEO'S OFFICE TO SHIFT

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) in West Bengal is set to be shifted to a new premises at the building of the Shipping Corporation of India from Monday, ending an 18-year-long stint at its Netaji Subhas Road address, officials said on Sunday.

The CEO office, previously in 21 Netaji Subhas Road in the Balmer Lawrie Building, is being shifted due to space constraints, rising staff strength and security concerns. —*PTI*

- In line with directives from the poll panel, police commissioners and superintendents of police have started visiting police stations to review law and order arrangements ahead of the ensuing elections, an official from the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer's office said.

CEC acting under 'executive's thumb', says Oppn notice

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The notices moved by the Opposition MPs in Parliament seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar have accused him of "acting under the thumb of the executive", besides blaming him for "mass disenfranchisement" through the SIR exercise, and raising questions on his appointment.

The notices submitted in the two Houses of Parliament on March 12 list seven charges against the CEC as grounds of "proved misbehaviour", calling for his removal.

Opposition MPs, 130 in the Lok Sabha and 63 in Rajya Sabha, have also sought a motion to remove the CEC.

Opposition has alleged that the CEC has effectively converted the ECI from a neutral electoral body into an instrument executing the executive's political agenda.

Asked about it, TMC Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien said they are waiting for action. "If the notices are not taken up by the Union government, doubts will be raised about a tacit understanding between the executive and the CEC," he said.

The notices termed maintaining a level playing field "the heart and soul of electoral democracy", and part of the basic structure of the Constitution. —*PTI*

—ANI

US men booked for flying drone near Kochi ICG HQ

KOCHI, 22 MARCH

Two US nationals have been booked after allegedly flying a drone near the Coast Guard Headquarters in Fort Kochi, police said. Katie Michelle Phelps, 32 and Christopher Ross Harvey, 35, from California, arrived as tourists and were seen recording videos on Saturday morning. They were spotted by tourism police, who detained them. Fort Kochi, a red zone housing Navy and Coast Guard facilities, strictly bans drone activities. The police seized the drone and a laptop. The duo was later released after notices to appear before police during ongoing investigations, officials added. —*PTI*

Forest staff launch bid to tranquilise Wayanad elephant

WAYANAD, 22 MARCH

The Kerala Forest Department has started a programme to tranquilise a rogue elephant, known locally as "Muttikomban," in Vadakkanad near here. The elephant has repeatedly raided farmlands, destroyed crops and threatened residents, leading to protests after it was involved in a farmer's death. Officials attempted to dart the animal near Kaloorkunnu but it retreated into the forest. Wildlife watchers are tracking the elephant which continues to pose risks to lives and property. Forest authorities said efforts to tranquilise the tusker will resume soon as they are monitor its movements closely to prevent further damage to property and danger to human beings and settlements. —*PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

'Dhurandhar 2' collects Rs 339 crore in three days

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Aditya Dhar's 'Dhurandhar: The Revenge', starring Ranveer Singh, has crossed Rs 300 crore in three days since its release. The film, also featuring R Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Sanjay Dutt, Sara Arjun, and Rakesh Bedi, opened with a record Rs 43 crore from previews and Rs 102.55 crore on day one. Its total collection now stands at Rs 339.27 crore nett domestically, with a worldwide gross of Rs 404.54 crore, according to Sacnilk. Set in Pakistan's Karachi's Lyari, the film depicts covert operations against major terror organisations and geopolitical events, following Singh's character Hamza Ali Mazari's rise in the Karachi underworld. —*PTI*

MBBS graduate ends life over adopting cat

HYDERABAD, 22 MARCH

A 23-year-old MBBS graduate ended her life in Alwal after a disagreement with her family over keeping a pet cat at home. Police said, the deceased, T Princy, alias Sreshta, from Risala Bazar had recently completed MBBS and was preparing for postgraduate studies. Princy had recently brought a pet cat, which led to frequent arguments with her family. Upset over the issue, Princy allegedly hanged herself in her flat on Friday while her family had gone out. "Her parents called to check if she had lunch, but when she did not answer, they asked neighbours to check on her. The neighbours found her hanging from the ceiling fan in the hall," the SI said. No suicide note was found, the Sub Inspector said. —*PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

ULFA(I) attacks Assam Police camp, 4 injured

It is retaliation against cops' anti-terror ops, say militants

TINSUKIA, 22 MARCH

At least four Assam Police commandos were injured in a militant attack on a police camp in Tinsukia district early on Sunday, a senior officer said.

ULFA(I), which claimed responsibility for the attack in the Jagun area, said 'Operation Bujoni' was carried out in retaliation against Assam Police's repeated operations against the banned outfit, and alleged drone attacks by the Army on its camps last year.

The attack comes ahead of the state assembly elections, scheduled on 9 April. The police officer said the attack was carried out around 2.30 am.

The militants fired rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) shells at the camp, with five of the launched shells exploding. Commandos stationed at the camp immediately retaliated, leading to a brief exchange of gunfire.

The officer said the attack is suspected to have been carried out by a seven-member group, which escaped across the border with Arunachal Pradesh in the darkness.

An injured man is being treated at Assam Medical College after an attack on a police commando camp in the Tinsukia district of Assam —*PTI*

The four commandos injured in the attack were taken to Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh. AMCH superintendent Dhruvajyoti Bhuyan said the injured were out of danger and stable.

Meanwhile, ULFA(I), in a press statement, owed responsibility for the attack and said it was conducted as per its 'Operation Bujoni.' It maintained that it had not carried out any operation against the police as a gesture towards the peace moves of the Himanta Biswa Sarma government.

However, our leaders and cadres were targeted by security agencies, and many were killed, the ULFA(I) claimed.

On 29 December 2023, the Indian government and the Assam government had signed a historic peace pact with the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to end the insurgency.

The deal includes a 1.5 lakh crore investment package for Assam, legislative safeguards for indigenous rights, and surrender of weapons by the insurgent group.

ULFA (I) led by Paresh Baruah, broke away, refusing to participate in talks unless the core issue of "sovereignty" was discussed. They remain active, often engaging in extortion and violence from hideouts in Myanmar. — PTI

PRESSURE TO ALLOT TENDER

Ex-Punjab minister Bhullar, dad, booked for official's suicide

CHANDIGARH, 22 MARCH

The police booked former Punjab minister Laljit Singh Bhullar in connection with the suicide of a state warehousing corporation official, officials said on Sunday.

Gagandeep Singh Randhawa, the district manager of the Punjab State Warehousing Corporation in Amritsar, allegedly killed himself by consuming poison on Saturday. The police also booked Bhullar's father, Sukhdev Singh Bhullar, and personal assistant Dilbag Singh.The case was registered as per a complaint by Randhawa's wife, Upinder Kaur, on Saturday.

On Saturday, Bhullar resigned from the cabinet.

Earlier, a video surfaced on social media in which Randhawa was heard saying that he had consumed Celphos and accused the transport minister of harassment.

Bhullar, the MLA from Patti in Tarn Taran, rejected the allegations against him.

In her complaint to the police, Randhawa's wife claimed that her husband was pressured to allot a warehouse tender to Bhullar's father and was threatened with violence.

In the FIR, Kaur said the Punjab State Warehousing Corporation had awarded tenders in October 2025 for the construction of new warehouses. Bhullar was one of the people who bid for a tender for the construction of godowns by his father, Sukhdev Singh Bhullar, in Patti and Bhikhiwind. Kaur, in her complaint said her husband told her that he was pressured to award the tender to Bhullar's father. Kaur alleged that after the warehouse tender was issued to another party, Bhullar hounded her husband.

Bhullar, through WhatsApp calls, used to threaten him with violence and asked him to cancel the tender and issue it to his father, she said. —*PTI*

'Declare 1971 Pak killings of Bengali Hindus as genocide'

WASHINGTON, 22 MARCH

US Congressman Greg Landsman has introduced a resolution in the US House of Representatives seeking to recognise the atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army and its allies, Jamaat-e-Islami, against Bengali Hindus on 25 March 1971, as "war crimes and genocide."

Landsman, a Democrat Congressman from Ohio, moved the resolution in the US House of Representatives on Friday, and it has been referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

The resolution states that on the night of 25 March 1971, the Government of Pakistan imprisoned Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and its army, and radical groups inspired by the ideology of Jamaat-e-Islami, began a crackdown throughout East Pakistan code-named "Operation Searchlight" that involved widespread massacres of civilians.

The bodies of people slaughtered by the Pakistan army in December 1971 —*WIKIPEDIA*

It said that on 28 March 1971, the US Consul General in Dacca, Archer Blood, sent a telegram to Washington titled "Selective Genocide," in which he wrote, "Moreover, with the support of the Pak military, non-Bengali Muslims are systematically murdering Bengalis and Hindus."

Landsman noted that on 6 April 1971, in what became known as the "Blood Telegram", Consul General Blood sent an objection to the US Government's silence on the conflict, signed by 20 members of the Consulate General Dacca.

The resolution moved by Landsman urges the House of Representatives to condemn the atrocities committed by the armed forces of Pakistan against the people of Bangladesh on and after 25 March 1971. — *PTI*

SC directs states, UTs to submit details of prisons

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The Supreme Court directed all states and Union Territories to furnish updated details about jails, including the sanctioned capacity of each prison and steps taken to check overcrowding, by 18 May. Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta also asked the states and UTs to provide details about the number of women's prisons and the facilities available in them, including the measures taken to ensure education for children.

The bench noted that senior advocate Gaurav Agrawal, who is assisting the SC as an amicus curiae in a suo motu matter concerning inhuman conditions in jails, has drawn its attention to the fact that the statistics placed on record by the states and UTs pertain to 2023.

The bench said the data should include capacity of each prison, number of prisoners, percentage of overcrowding in each jail, details of women's jails, facilities provided to women and children accompanying them (including educational and medical facilities), sanctioned strength of prison staff, existing vacancies, steps taken to fill them, along with all other aspects.

The bench directed the states and UTs to furnish particulars indicating the sanctioned capacity of prisons, the number of prisoners as on 1 March 2026, along with occupancy rates.

The SC posted the matter for hearing on 26 May. — *PTI*

Bulk diesel price hike withdrawn for Gujarat fishers

GANDHINAGAR, 22 MARCH

The hike in bulk diesel prices has been withdrawn for Gujarat's fishermen after the state took up the matter with the Centre, Fisheries Minister Jitu Vaghani said.

The price of premium or higher-grade petrol was increased on Friday by Rs 2 per litre, while the rate of bulk diesel sold to industrial users was hiked by Rs 22.43 a litre, reflecting the spike in global oil prices amid the West Asia conflict.

Vaghani on Saturday said the Gujarat government had urged the Centre to offer relief to the fisheries sector by considering a "special exception" and withdrawing the increase of Rs 22.43 per litre in the price of bulk diesel used in fishermen's boats.

The state urged that fishermen be considered on par with retail customers, he said.

"Under the guidance of Prime Minister Modi, the Centre has accepted this reasonable representation of the fishermen of Gujarat. The Centre has instructed Bharat Petroleum to withdraw the increase of Rs 22.43 in the price of diesel used in fishermen's boats, a release said. Gujarat had signed a pact with Bharat Petroleum to ensure diesel for fishermen at a discounted price. However, the PSU recently increased the diesel price for fishermen by Rs 22.43 per litre. — *PTI*

Oman flash floods kill 2 Keralites, one missing

THIRU'PURAM, 22 MARCH

Senior Congress leader VD Satheesan has called for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's urgent intervention after flash floods in Oman resulted in the deaths of two people from Kerala and the disappearance of another.

The victims, Yusuf and Shamla from Trithala, were reportedly travelling in a vehicle when they were caught in the sudden floods in Al Batinah Governorate.

Satheesan expressed deep concern over the incident, urging the Centre to coordinate with Omani authorities for conductinf rescue operations amid the ongoing heavy rains all over Oman

He requested all possible assistance by the Indian embassy to protect the affected families and to expedite search and rescue operations, emphasising the need for immediate action. — *PTI*

One dead, 7 injured in Ch'garh ropeway crash

People inspect a damaged ropeway trolley after a crash near the Khallari Mata Temple, in the Mahasamund district of Ch'garh—*PTI*

MAHASAMUND, 22 MARCH

A woman was killed and seven others were injured when a ropeway trolley crashed while descending a hilltop temple in Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund district. The incident happened around 10 am when the trolley cable snapped, causing it to fall while descending to Khallari Mata temple in Khallari village.

The victims, who had come to pray, included Ayushi Satkar, 28 from Raipur. Seven others were hospitalised. An investigation is going on, officials said, as rescue measures are being reviewed. — *PTI*

Banned Chinese walkie-talkies seized at Mumbai port

MUMBAI, 22 MARCH

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has seized 11,060 prohibited walkie-talkie sets and second-hand hard disk drives (HDDs) collectively valued at Rs 9.25 crore at the Nhava Sheva Port in Navi Mumbai, officials said.

A father and son, owners of two Mumbai firms that had imported these goods without due permissions, have been arrested under the Customs Act, an official release said on Saturday.

Based on specific intelligence, a team of Directorate of Revenue Intelligence officials seized Baofeng BF-888S walkie-talkies worth Rs 2.5 crore, and second-hand HDDs (considered e-waste) valued at Rs 6.75 crore.

The banned items were concealed among miscellaneous electronic products valued at Rs 21 crore. The entire consignment of Rs 30.25 crore from eight containers shipped from China was seized for misdeclaration, officials said.

The Baofeng BF-888S walkie-talkies have been blacklisted by the Union Department of Telecommunications (DoT) as they could be used for unauthorised communication by banned anti-national organisations, posing a threat to national security.

Meanwhile, in Navi Mumbai a hotel owner has been arrested by the police.

Police have registered a case against a hotel owner in Navi Mumbai for allegedly allowing four Turkish nationals, including two women, to stay in his hotel in the Sanpada area from 28 to 30 December 2025 without uploading their identity details on the police portal, officials said on Sunday. — *PTI*

FIGHTING SOCIAL EVIL

Child bride breaks free, lights up path for other victims

JODHPUR, 22 MARCH

A woman here reclaimed her life through a court battle breaking a decade-long union that was solemnised when she was just 12.

On Thursday, Judge Varun Talwar of Family Court annulled the marriage of Khushboo (name changed), observing that child marriage undermines both the present and future of children.

The marriage, solemnised in 2016 when Khushboo was about 12 years old, was declared void under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. Belonging to the Bishnoi community, Khushboo recalled being a schoolgirl and having little understanding of what was happening around her as elders arranged her marriage.

—*PTI*

The turning point came a few years later, when pressure from her in-laws to begin conjugal life bore down on her.

Determined not to continue in the union, she approached the police and was subsequently connected with social activist Kriti Bharti of Sarathi Trust.With Bharti's assistance, Khushboo filed a petition in the family court around 18 months ago, seeking annulment. During the hearings, she presented documents establishing her age at the time of marriage, maintaining that the union had been solemnised without her consent. Her in-laws claimed that the marriage had taken place after both parties were adults, but lost the case.

Bharti said getting the groom's side to agree to annulment was far from easy.

Khushboo's case sheds light on the role of certain customs that perpetuate child marriage. — *PTI*

ANDHRA MILK ADULTERATION TOLL RISES TO 16

RAJAVARAM, 22 MARCH

The death toll from suspected milk adulteration in East Godavari district has increased to 16, with three individuals still receiving treatment in hospitals, officials confirmed on Sunday. The incident, dating back to mid-February, involved adulterated milk supplied in Lalacheruvu, which caused severe health issues like vomiting, abdominal pain, anuria, and acute renal dysfunction, leading to hospitalisations.

The case was uncovered on 22 February when patients with kidney failure symptoms appeared in Chowdeswaranagar and Swaroopanagar, prompting an epidemiological investigation. Laboratory results indicated the victims died of multi-organ failure caused by ethylene glycol in the contaminated milk.

A paramedic collects the blood of a woman affected by the milk adulteration racket in Lalacheruvu —*PTI*

Over 100 families received milk from a Narasapuram dairy unit, which was immediately shut down following the discovery.

Between 16 February and 21 March, 20 people were admitted; 16 died, three remain under treatment, and one has recovered. The patients included elderly persons and children, with many requiring dialysis and ventilator support.

House-to-house surveys covered over 300 individuals, with most blood samples returning normal results. The Food Safety Department inspected the dairy and sent samples for analysis. Police registered a case on 22 February following a complaint from the deceased woman's son, Tadi Seetharamaiah. — *PTI*

WORLD WATER DAY

A farmer collects water from a temporary well on the dry bed of the Ganga river on the occasion of World Water Day, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh —PTI

Ticket rebellions, SIR fallout cloud WB elections

Open rebellions over ticket distribution across parties, combined with the SIR fallout, have added a fresh layer of uncertainty to West Bengal's political landscape, raising questions over cadre cohesion and electoral calculations ahead of the assembly polls.

Soon after candidate lists were announced, both the ruling TMC and the Opposition BJP have witnessed protests, resignations, and resentment from cadres and leaders who have been denied tickets- a familiar feature of Bengal elections, but analysts say such resistance may carry greater electoral consequences this time.

The unrest has come at a politically sensitive moment as the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter lists has led to large-scale scrutiny and deletion of voter names, a development political observers believe could alter the electoral arithmetic in several closely contested seats.

From the ruling TMC to the Opposition BJP, simmering resentment among disgruntled leaders and grassroots workers has exposed the internal strains that often accompany large-scale electoral reshuffles.

Along with the dissent and organisational friction within parties, the churn in voter rolls could make booth-level mobilisation and campaign cohesion more crucial than in previous elections, the analysts said.

Within the TMC, the scale of candidate reshuffle has been among the most extensive undertaken by the party in recent assembly polls.

The party dropped 74 sitting MLAs, nearly a third of its legislative strength, while announcing candidates for 291 of the 294 seats, signalling a calculated attempt by the TMC leadership to counter anti-incumbency, introduce younger faces and recalibrate local political equations ahead of the high-stakes contest. In Malda's Harishchandrapur, state minister and three-time MLA Tajmul Hossain accused the party of "betrayal" after he was replaced by Matiur Rahman, who had contested the same seat as a BJP candidate in the 2021 assembly polls.

Soon after candidate lists were announced, both TMC and the Opposition BJP have witnessed protests, resignations, and resentment from cadres and leaders who have been denied tickets —PTI

"I worked for the party for 15 years. Someone suddenly comes and gets the ticket. The party has betrayed me, and it will have to face the consequences," Hossain said. His followers went a step further, alleging that the seat had been "sold for money", a charge the party has not officially responded to.

Further north in Jalpaiguri's Rajganj, MLA Khageswar Roy resigned from his post as district party chairman after the party fielded Asian Games gold medallist Swapna Barman from constituency.

In North 24 Parganas' Amdanga, protests erupted after three-time MLA Rafiqur Rahaman was denied renomination and replaced by Peerzada Kasem Siddiqui. Supporters blocked roads, burnt tyres and raised slogans demanding that the party reconsider its decision.

Discontent also surfaced in Hooghly's Chinsurah, where the party nominated youth leader and IT cell chief Debangshu Bhattacharya in place of three-time MLA Asit Mazumdar.

Mazumdar publicly expressed disappointment and hinted at withdrawing from politics.

Bhattacharya, however, struck a conciliatory note, describing Mazumdar as "a father figure" and expressing hope he would receive the veteran leader's blessings during the campaign.

The BJP too has faced pockets of resistance over candidate selection.

Party workers staged protests outside the BJP's state headquarters in Kolkata after the announcement of the second list of candidates, alleging that grassroots leaders had been overlooked while selecting nominees. Some protesters warned they would not allow campaigning by certain candidates unless the leadership reconsidered its choices.

BJP state president Samik Bhattacharya said, "We understand the sentiment of our workers, but the decision of the central leadership is final, and all of us have to abide by it."

Even the CPI(M), traditionally regarded as a highly disciplined organisation, has witnessed signs of internal friction. In Nadia's Kaliganj, a section of its workers vandalised a local party office after the Left Front nominated Sabina Yasmin, the mother of a child killed in poll-related violence last year, as its candidate. The party later expelled seven members for their involvement.

Political analysts say potential electoral consequences of ticket-related dissent may be sharper this time because of the simultaneous churn in voter rolls under the SIR exercise.

Data compiled across the state's 294 assembly constituencies suggests that in more than 200 segments, the number of voters affected by deletions or placed under scrutiny during the revision process exceeds the victory margins recorded in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

In at least 120 assembly constituencies, the number of deleted voters alone is higher than the Lok Sabha leading margin in those seats, while in around 40 constituencies it exceeds the margins recorded in the 2021 assembly polls.

In the 2021 assembly polls, the TMC won around 45 seats with margins of less than 8,000 votes, while the BJP secured nearly 20 segments within similar margins, underlining how relatively small shifts in votes can determine outcomes in a tightly contested election.

For the TMC, the leadership is banking on Mamata Banerjee's personal popularity and welfare-driven messaging to override local resentment, while for the BJP, seeking to expand its footprint after emerging as the principal Opposition in 2021, maintaining organisational cohesion across districts will be crucial.

West Bengal will go to the polls in two phases on 23 and 29 April. —PTI

SALAR سالار

Paravur battle: Satheesan confronts LDF's Taison

When VD Satheesan was chosen as Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly in 2021, it was seen as an experiment by the Congress-led UDF to revive its fortunes ahead of the 2026 elections.

Challenging a deeply entrenched Marxist leader like Pinarayi Vijayan, who is in his second term as CM, was considered by many analysts a herculean task for a politician who had risen through the ranks of Congress via student politics.

However, what Kerala witnessed was the phenomenal rise of a fiery strategist who led the UDF to victories in several by-elections, the Lok Sabha elections, and later in local body polls.

As the state prepares to elect its new government on 9 April, the question is whether Satheesan will be able to replicate this success across the state, as well as in his own constituency, Paravur, where he faces a formidable opponent.

LDF candidate ET Taison Master of the CPI said he will defeat the potential chief ministerial face of the UDF on his home turf.

The coastal seat in Ernakulam district, with an electorate of over 1.91 lakh voters, has remained thoroughly loyal to the Congress, though the CPI had its phases of dominance in earlier decades.

The constituency has been firmly in the hands of Congress since 2001, when Satheesan wrested it, ending decades-long Left dominance.

A Kerala Students Union (KSU) leader moulded through campus politics and a practising lawyer in the High Court, Satheesan's political journey in Paravur began with a defeat in 1996 from CPI's P Raju.

Unfazed by the debacle, he thoroughly worked in the constituency and subsequently built a strong grassroots network, gradually transforming his image into that of an accessible "next-door leader".

The sustained engagement translated into electoral success in 2001, and he kept winning five consecutive terms.

His victory margins have steadily risen over the years, crossing the 20,000 marks in both 2016 and 2021, underlining his dominance even during adverse political cycles.

In the last Assembly polls, he secured over 82,000 votes, defeating CPI's M T Nixon by more than 21,000 votes.

While addressing a recent roadshow in the constituency, Satheesan said the people of Paravoor have consistently given him large victory margins and described the constituency as emotionally close to him.

"The people here are like my family," Satheesan has said.

Reji, a Congress leader in Paravur, said no party worker is bothered about the results, but is only thinking about the lead.

He said Paravur was once a Left fortress where the CPI used to receive a majority of 6000-7000 votes in some panchayats. But all those civics units were later wrested by the Congress party through systematic efforts under the leadership of Satheesan.

The leader said that though Satheesan has been representing Paravur in the state Assembly for 25 consecutive years, his relationship with the constituency started three decades ago.

Though he had suffered a defeat in the 1996 assembly polls, he didn't go back from Paravur but worked hard in the constituency since then, Reji recalled.

The ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) is fielding an experienced two-time MLA this time.

Senior CPI leader Taison Master, a sitting MLA from Kaipamangalam, is in a renewed attempt to halt Satheesan's winning streak in the April 9 assembly elections.

A school teacher by profession, Master said his confidence has increased manifold as the campaign progresses each day.

The senior leader said he is banking on the extensive development initiatives implemented by the LDF government.

The CPI leader also said that though he is a sitting MLA of Kaipamangalam, he has close connections with Paravur, as he had begun his teaching career in a school there.

Unlike in the previous polls, the BJP has also put up a strong candidate -- Vathsala Prasannakumar -- in Paravur this time.

A former general secretary of the KPCC and a two-time chairperson of the North Paravur Municipality, she joined the BJP just weeks ago.

P Sankarankutty, a local BJP fellow-traveller, said the saffron party is contesting in its own symbol and therefore its vote share is likely to increase this time.

He said the present candidate is an experienced councillor and a two-time municipal chairperson.

With Satheesan playing a central role in the UDF's state-wide campaign, the outcome in Paravur is being closely watched as an indicator of both the front's prospects and his own standing as a chief ministerial contender.

The constituency comprises North Paravur municipality and 7 panchayats: Chendamangalam, Chittattukara, Ezhikkara, Kottuvally, Puthenvelikkara, Varapuzha and Vadakkekkara.

Local development, infrastructure and civic issues triggered by fast urbanisation due to its proximity to Kochi is a key campaign theme here this time. —PTI

VD Satheesan says that the people of Paravoor have consistently given him large victory margins and described the constituency as emotionally close to him —PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Tussle between regional, nat'l parties to 'safeguard' Assamese identity

- "Hijacking" of the primary issue of "Asomiya Jatiyotabad" (Assamese nationalism) by the national parties, coupled with the more expansive resources at their disposal, have made the regional parties to take sides with them for electoral survival, political analysts said.

As Assam prepares to elect a new government, regionalism remains a core issue for the state, which has been grappling with concerns over safeguarding its "identity" from the threat of "outsiders", mainly illegal migrants, for decades.

The relevance of regional political parties has come under question over the years with all major such outfits, including the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), aligning with national parties.

"Hijacking" of the primary issue of "Asomiya Jatiyotabad" (Assamese nationalism) by the national parties, coupled with the more expansive resources at their disposal, have made the regional parties to take sides with them for electoral survival, political analysts maintained. The "failure" of AGP to carve a strong path for regional forces even after leading two governments in the last four decades has also led to these parties being "sidelined", they said.

"Protection of culture, language, and identity has always been a concern for the Assamese people. And this has been used by different political dispensations in different manner," columnist and political analyst Brojen Deka said, speaking to PTI.

The "threat" to the indigenous people from Bengali-speaking Muslims, mostly of Bangladesh origin, has been viewed as the most prominent in recent decades, and continues to remain so, he maintained.

Elections have been fought, and governments formed with the purported promise of solving this issue, as recent as the current one, Deka claimed.

"If you see the BJP's sweeping entry into power in 2016, the poll plank was 'jati, mati, bheti' (community, land, home), a direct reference to safeguarding the indigenous identity. And in 2026 elections also, it is still promising to act against illegal Bangladeshis from the state," the columnist pointed out.

It was with this assurance of identifying and deporting illegal foreigners that the AGP led governments twice in 1985 and 1996, a party formed by leaders who were at the forefront of the anti-infiltration, six-year-long Assam agitation, Nava Kumar Mahanta, retired professor of Nowgong College (now Nagaon University) said.

"It was a regional party which led the government for two terms. But now, it is merely a smaller ally to the BJP. In the last two Assembly elections, we have seen that the party has been contesting in only 26 seats out of total of 126," he said.

The relevance of regional political parties has come under question over the years with all major outfits aligning with national parties —PTI

"And what is more worrying now is that this year, 13 out of its 26 candidates are Muslims and many of them Bengali-speaking ones, a community which the AGP had earlier viewed with suspicion as being illegal migrants," Mahanta said.

He added that AGP had a secular outlook since its formation, but had always distanced itself from the Bengali-speaking Muslims.

"This seems to have gradually reversed as one feels that in the pursuit of power by a few leaders, the AGP is being used to woo the community to ensure more numbers for the ruling alliance," the retired professor said.

The AGP has also deviated from its core identity of propagating "regionalism" by partnering with the BJP for over a decade now, a party known for its Hindutva brand of politics and promoting uniform codes, the analyst said.

Other regional parties, like the Raijor Dal and the Assam Jatiya Parishad, ostensibly formed to fight for Assamese identity at the beginning of this decade, have aligned with the Opposition Congress, a party originally blamed for creating the illegal migrant's problem in the state for the sake of 'vote bank'.

Deka maintained that the seed for the regional parties to be overshadowed by the national ones was sowed when the later started projecting itself as the "champions of jatiyotabad".

"It began with former Congress CM Tarun Gogoi, who effectively took away this core issue through work such as updating the NRC and his famous line 'Who is Badruddin Ajmal'," he said.

Gogoi had made the comment ahead of the 2006 state elections, when perfume baron Ajmal floated his own party AIUDF. The party has been tasting electoral success from Bengali-speaking Muslim-dominated areas.

"The same was done by the BJP a few years later when it vowed to protect 'jati, mati, bheti'," Deka added.

Both Deka and Mahanta maintained that the relevance of regional politics remains in the state, and chances of its revival are also there.

They said that as the average Assamese person continues to be concerned with safeguarding the indigenous culture and language, the national parties' generic take on such a contentious yet crucial issue still leaves the space for the regional parties."The present AGP leadership has to see beyond the power prism and start working with the principles it was based on. It also needs to attract the young generation to take it forward," Mahanta said.

"The sentiment of 'Asomiya Jatiyotabad' weighs high for the Assamese voter and public. And people understand that a strong regional voice can only safeguard it. It is for the regional parties to fill this gap, which the larger national parties are now attempting to plug," Deka added. —PTI

— SCREENGRAB

West Bank settlers torch cars, attack Palestinians

RAMALLAH, 22 MARCH

Israeli settlers attacked multiple Palestinian villages over the weekend, smashing cars, setting fires, and injuring several individuals. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported three Palestinians in Jalud suffered head wounds after confronting settlers. The violence coincides with continued Israeli settlement expansion amid rising tensions and broader conflict escalation. The Israeli military responded to arson and disturbances but did not report arrests. Attacks occurred in villages near Jenin, Nablus, and in regions like Masafer Yatta and the Jordan Valley, during Eid al-Fitr. The UN reports 25 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli settlers or soldiers this year, with the Palestinian Authority documenting arson attacks on mosques and property. —*PTI*

At least 64 killed in hospital strike in Sudan: WHO

SUDAN, 22 MARCH

At least 64 people, including 13 children, were killed in a strike on Al Daein Teaching Hospital in East Darfur last week, according to the World Health Organisation. The strike also injured 89 and rendered the hospital non-functional. Tedros Ghebreyesus, WHO Director, said on X that the devastating war has claimed over 40,000 lives, with aid groups suggesting the death toll is much higher. The conflict, since April 2023, arises from a power struggle between the military and the RSF, which blames the military for the attack. The military denies the claim, suggesting the strike targeted a police station. Ghebreyesus called for de-escalation, stating, "Enough blood has been spilled. Enough suffering has been inflicted." —*PTI*

If shutdown continues, ICE will do airport security

WASHINGTON, 22 MARCH

President Donald Trump announced plans for federal immigration officers, specifically ICE, to assist in airport security from Monday if Democrats do not pass a DHS funding bill. Trump posted on social media that he had instructed ICE to prepare for deployment, promising to arrest "all Illegal Immigrants." The move aims to intensify ICE enforcement amid a partial shutdown causing long lines at airports. Democrats oppose funding unless reforms are made, including better ID for law enforcement officers and judicial warrants. Trump criticises the Somali community, claiming they "totally destroyed" Minnesota, and says ICE will do a "far better" job of securing airports if Democrats refuse cooperation. —*PTI*

Majority countries ban phones in schools: UNESCO

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

More than half of the world's countries have banned mobile phones in schools, citing concerns over attention spans and cyberbullying, UNESCO reports. The GEM team states 114 education systems now enforce national bans, up from 24 per cent in June 2023. The trend reflects worries about social media's impact on children, with Facebook research indicating 32% of teenage girls felt worse about their bodies after Instagram use. TikTok's algorithm targets teenagers with body image content every 39 seconds, promoting eating disorder-related material every eight minutes. Countries like France, Bolivia, and Malta have introduced bans, with many nations opting for policies restricting phone use rather than outright bans. —*PTI*

Iran says will shut Hormuz if Trump hits energy infra

IRGC will destroy firms with US shares if energy infra hit

DUBAI, 22 MARCH

Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has threatened to completely close the Strait of Hormuz if US President Donald Trump proceeded with his threat to attack its energy infrastructure.

Earlier, Iran had said that non-enemy ships could sail through Hormuz – a claim that is unlikely given that insurance premiums have skyrocketed since the US-Israeli strikes.

IRGC reportedly said that companies with US shares would be "completely destroyed" if Iranian energy facilities were targeted.

When Israel targeted the Iran's South Pars natural gas field, Tehran responded by targeting Gulf country's energy infrastructure.

Trump had earlier said that the US didn't depend on the Strait of Hormuz and was helping in trying to open it for its allies such as "Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and others".

He said it would need to be guarded after the US military operation ends, and demanded that his allies helped him.

GROUND INVASION IN LEBANON?

Israel on Sunday expanded its list of targets to include all bridges over the Litani River in south Lebanon, which Defense Minister Israel Katz said Hezbollah is using to move fighters and weapons into southern Lebanon. It later struck the Qasmiyeh bridge near Tyre.

Katz also ordered the military to accelerate its destruction of Lebanese homes near Israel's northern border as part of a strategy he described as aligned with Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said that Israel's attacks on bridges are a "prelude to a ground invasion", according to Lebanon's National News Agency.

Meanwhile, an Israeli civilian was killed in the northern town of Misgav Am in what Israel's military said "seemed to be" a rocket attack by Lebanon's Hezbollah.

WEST ASIA WAR
DAY-23

STRIKES CONTINUE

At least six overnight attacks targeted a US diplomatic and logistics centre at Baghdad airport, Iraqi officials said, while Saudi Arabia said three missiles had been detected over Riyadh targeting its oil rich fields. The UAE said it had responded to Iranian missile and drone attacks. At least 2,000 have been killed and millions since the fighting broke out in early February. —*Agencies*

Firefighters works to extinguish fire at the site that was struck by an Iranian missile in Dimona, southern Israel on Sunday —*PTI*

'No radiation from strikes on Israeli nuclear sites'

LONDON, 22 MARCH

The UN nuclear watchdog said it had not received reports of damage to the Israeli centre or abnormal radiation levels after Iranian strikes damaged cities around it.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said on X that "no abnormal radiation levels have been detected" near the Negev Desert. Israel is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons, though it doesn't confirm or deny their existence. Tehran praised the attack as show of strength.

"If the Israeli regime is unable to intercept missiles in the heavily protected Dimona area, it is, operationally, a sign of entering a new phase of the battle," Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said.

Israel denied responsibility for hitting Natanz on Saturday while Iran said there was no leakage. Natanz was also hit in the first week of the ongoing war and in the 12-day war last June.

The IAEA said the bulk of Iran's estimated 441 kilograms of enriched uranium is elsewhere, beneath the rubble at its Isfahan facility.

'DANGER TO THE WORLD'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday said the recent missile attacks on Diego Garcia shows that Iran has the capacity to reach deep into Europe and poses danger to the entire world.

"If you want proof that Iran endangers the entire world, the last 48 hours have given it. In the last 48 hours, Iran targeted a civilian area. They're using that as a mass murder weapon. Their intention is to murder civilians," Netanyahu said when visiting Arad.

Pointing out that Iran fired an intercontinental ballistic missile on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, Netanyahu said, "That's 4,000 kilometres.

I've been warning all the time. They now have the capacity to reach deep into Europe. They already have fired on European countries -- Cyprus. They are putting everyone in their sights."

Iran denied targeting the base.

UK SENDS NUKE-POWERED SUB

A nuclear-powered British submarine, the HMS Anson, has reportedly arrived in the Arabian Sea.

The vessel is said to have departed from the Australian city of Perth on 6 March and is believed to be taking up a strategic position in the northern Arabian Sea.

Equipped with advanced weaponry, the HMS Anson is fitted with "Tomahawk Block IV land-attack missiles" with a range of 1,600 km and "Spearfish heavyweight torpedoes," providing formidable offensive capabilities.

The United Kingdom had earlier restricted such access to operations aimed at preventing Iranian missile launches that directly threatened British lives or interests, in an attempt to not get drawn into the war. —*Agencies*

WAR TAKES TOLL ON CIVILIANS

The West Asia war has claimed thousands of lives across several countries and displaced millions, with signs that it will only worsen:

1,500 people killed in Iran.	1,000 people killed in Lebanon.

Dozens across Gulf states and Israel.

1.2M people displaced in Lebanon.	3.2 million displaced in Iran.

66 Recent escalation has killed or wounded the equivalent of one classroom of children every day

Ted Chaiban, Deputy Chief of the UN Children's Fund

Lanka hikes public transport fuel prices by 25%

COLOMBO, 22 MARCH

The Sri Lankan government on Sunday raised fuel retail prices at midnight by 25 per cent, the second such hike in a week. As a conservation measure, the government had rationed fuel retail distribution based on a QR code issued for each vehicle.

With the two cost escalations, the fuel retail prices are set to return to the levels of the 2022 economic crisis. The crisis led the then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to quit office in 2022 amid civil unrest.

Meanwhile, non-state bus operators in Sri Lanka on Sunday warned 90 per cent of their fleet may be off the road due to the extensive price hike of fuel. The private owners dominate the public transport service with a market share of 65-75 per cent. The state fleet share is around 25-35 per cent.

The per liter price of diesel used for all transport purposes going up by Sri Lankan rupees (LKR) 79 to make it LKR 382 per litre.

The three-wheeler taxi operators, dominated by Indian Bajaj, said the price of c petrol was also raised to nearly LKR 400 per litre.

The Lanka Private Bus Owners' Association (LPBOA) announced that it will launch a nationwide strike commencing at 6:00 pm if the scheduled bus fare revision is not officially announced by 5.00pm on Sunday. —*PTI*

Patriot missile that killed 10 in Bahrain was US operated: Report

DUBAI, 22 MARCH

An American-operated Patriot air defence battery likely fired an interceptor missile that injured 10 people in Bahrain on 9 March, Reuters reported. Both Bahrain and the US had blamed Iran for the attacks.

Bahrain confirmed to Reuters that Patriot missiles were involved during the blast at the Mahazza neighbourhood on Sitra island, offshore from the capital Manama and also home to an oil refinery.

The Bahrain government spokesperson said that it was fired to intercept an Iranian drone, but neither Washington nor the Kingdom provided evidence that there was an attack during the time of the incident.

However, an analysis of open-source visuals and commercial satellite imagery appear to show that three American munitions were likely launched from a US Patriot battery located about 7 km to the southwest of the Mahazza neighbourhood.

The Middlebury analysis said that the Patriot was fired in an "irresponsible intercept attempt" and appeared to blast midair.

The US is believed to have used a Patriot missile as part of a double tap strike that killed at least 160 people in an Iranian elementary school in Minab —*Agencies*

6 killed as Qatar helicopter crashes

CAIRO, 22 MARCH

Qatar said on Sunday six people have been confirmed killed in a Qatari helicopter crash in the Persian Gulf nation's territorial water.

The Interior Ministry said one person is still missing from the crash, which took place the day before.

The Defence Ministry blamed "technical malfunction" for the helicopter crash.

While, the Interior Ministry's statement didn't clarify the nationality of the dead or say if they were civilian or military. —*PTI*

Iran internet blackout stretches into 4th week

The ongoing internet blackout in Iran has entered its fourth consecutive week, crossing more than 500 hours of restricted connectivity, as authorities continue to enforce a near-total shutdown, according to cyber monitoring organisation NetBlocks.

US President Donald Trump is set to feature on a gold coin to commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary. The 24-karat gold coin will be only the second time a living President has featured on a coin, the first being Calvin Coolidge, the 30th president. US Federal law states that no living president can appear on US currency.

Japanese national detained in Iran released

One of two Japanese nationals detained in Iran were released and will return to Japan, said Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi. . Another Japanese national who was arrested earlier this year is still in custody, said Motegi.

4 killed as Russia, Ukraine trade strikes ahead of peace talks

KYIV, 22 MARCH

Officials reported at least four deaths on Saturday following a series of attacks between Russia and Ukraine, as high-level talks on ending the war were set to begin.

A Russian drone strike on a home in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia killed a man and a woman and wounded six others, including two children, according to regional Governor Ivan Fedorov. Elsewhere, Russian strikes knocked out power across much of the northern Chernihiv region.

In Russia, two women were killed, and another was wounded by Ukrainian shelling.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Thursday that he has sent a delegation to Miami to revive suspended, US-brokered peace talks.

US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff said the talks were "constructive." He said the meetings, which included US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, "focused ... moving closer to a peace agreement."

Kremlin's Dmitry Peskov said that a new round of US-mediated negotiations will take place soon. —*PTI*

INDIA 13TH

Pakistan tops Global Terrorism Index 2026

ISLAMABAD, 22 MARCH

Pakistan has been ranked number one among 163 countries on the Global Terrorism Index for the first time, following a 6 per cent increase in terrorism-related fatalities during 2025.

In the Global Terrorism Index 2026, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), Pakistan recorded 1,139 deaths last year, highlighting a deteriorating security landscape.

On the global stage, Pakistan now sits alongside Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of Congo as one of five nations where nearly 70 per cent of all global terrorism deaths occur.

India ranked 13th most affected country, showing a 43 per cent reduction in terror-related incidents and improved safety in 2025, despite regional security challenges, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir.

Nigeria recorded the largest increase in 2025, with fatalities rising by 46 per cent to 750.

This latest ranking follows a second-place finish in 2025, confirming a steady and violent decline in the country's stability.

Death in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) rose by nearly 28 per cent to 467, driven by attacks carried out by the IS-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Colombia fell into the ten most impacted countries for the first time since 2013.

Syria experienced the most IS attacks, with 238 incidents.

In the West, deaths from terrorism rose sharply, increasing by 280 per cent to 57 deaths.

Youth and minors accounted for 42 per cent of all terror-related investigations in Europe and North America in 2025, a threefold increase since 2021.

The year was also marked by the absence globally of large-scale attacks.

The deadliest attack killed up to 120 people, compared to 237 killed in 2024 and over 1,100 in 2023. —*Agencies*

Two huge explosions rock Havana, fires reported amid island-wide blackouts and 90% internet drop. —*x*

Cuba sees 3rd blackout in March amid US sanctions

HAVANA, 22 MARCH

Cuba's power grid collapsed on Saturday, leaving the country without electricity as the Communist government battles with a decaying infrastructure and a US-imposed oil blockade.

The outage was the second in the past week and the third in March.

The Cuban Electric Union, which reports to the Ministry of Energy and Mines, announced a total blackout across the island, attributed to a sudden failure at the Nuevitas thermoelectric plant in Camaguey province. Authorities said they were working to restore power.

Cuba's ageing energy grid has eroded in recent years. But the government has also blamed the outages on a US energy blockade after US President Donald Trump in January warned of tariffs on any country that sells or provides oil to Cuba.

Cuba produces barely 40 per cent of the fuel it needs to power its economy. President Miguel Diaz-Canel has said the island has not received oil from foreign suppliers for three months. —*PTI*

— PTI

Sales of AC clouded by rains and price hike

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Air-conditioner manufacturers are cautious after unusual rainfall triggered by western disturbances swept large parts of the country, which could disrupt early summer demand. March is traditionally when demand for cooling products accelerates, but the unusual weather has left manufacturers jittery. However, industry executives remain hopeful for the rise in temperature in April. The industry is also reeling from price hikes amid the ongoing geopolitical tension in West Asia, which has led to an increase in the prices of raw materials, such as plastics, and a limited availability of LPG gas, impacting production. Prices of other large appliances are also likely to rise 10 to 12 per cent, industry leaders indicated.—*PTI*

NCLAT grants CSR relief to 50 IL&FS firms

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has exempted debt ridden IL&FS companies from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) obligations. The order will benefit around 50 'amber' and 'red' companies of the debt-ridden IL&FS Group, which are protected under the moratorium granted by the NCLAT from its order dated 15 October 2018. Last year, the IL&FS Group petitioned the NCLAT to rectify this, seeking an exemption for these financially distressed entities. "We find that sufficient cause has been shown in the application for allowing the prayer made by the Applicant to dispense with the requirement to undertake spending the necessary amount on CSR activities under Section 135(5) of Companies Act, 2013 from Red/Amber Companies," said NCLAT.—*PTI*

Coal imports fall 4.2% as domestic production rises

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Coal imports dropped 4.2 per cent to 213.10 million tonnes (MT) in the April-January period of the current fiscal year. With seaborne prices showing an uptick, imports are likely to remain subdued in the near term. The decline underscores the country's push towards self-reliance in coal production amid surging domestic output, even as global thermal coal prices firm up due to supply constraints and geopolitical tensions. According to data from Mjunction Services Ltd—a B2B e-commerce platform and joint venture between SAIL and Tata Steel—non-coking coal imports reached 127.80 MT during the April-January this year. This represents a decrease from the 141.18 MT imported during the same period last year. —*PTI*

Max Fashion to open 40-50 stores in country

CHENNAI, 22 MARCH

Multinational fashion brand Max Fashion has set a target to open 40-50 stores across the country in the next year, a top official said here. Under its expansion plan, Max Fashion hopes to have 100 stores in Tamil Nadu over the next two years. The company's 34th store in Chennai and the 71st outlet in Tamil Nadu were recently inaugurated by actress and model Kayadu Lohar in the city on Saturday. Max Fashion Regional Business Head Sathish Kumar said, "We are delighted to mark the opening of our 34th store in Chennai and 71st in Tamil Nadu." Currently, the company has a presence in Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Tuticorin and Nagercoil.—*PTI*

India urea plants at half capacity amid LNG crisis

GAIL, IOCL, BPCL curtailed LNG supply after force majeure

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

India's urea plants are running at half capacity after force majeure declarations disrupted LNG flows through the Strait of Hormuz amid escalating West Asia tensions, industry sources said.

Petronet LNG Ltd, which operates India's largest liquefied natural gas receiving terminal, declared force majeure after upstream suppliers cited their inability to deliver contracted volumes.

The move triggered supply curtailments by state-owned gas distributors GAIL (India) Ltd, Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), which supply gas under RasGas contracts to fertiliser units across the country.

Urea output at affected plants has consequently dropped by around 50 per cent. Paradoxically, energy consumption at these facilities had climbed by as much as 40 per cent as large ammonia-urea trains running at reduced loads suffer a sharp deterioration in thermal efficiency.

Several urea plants were compelled to overdraw gas allocations momentarily to keep operations within safe parameters —*ANI*

"Plants of this scale are not designed to ramp up and down at will," one plant operations manager said.

The situation has been compounded by the breakdown in operational coordination. Following Ras Laffan LNG Company's force majeure invocation, gas consumption mandates have at times been communicated to fertiliser units late at night, leaving plant managers scrambling to make abrupt load adjustments.

Several plants, sources said, were compelled to overdraw gas allocations momentarily to keep operations within safe parameters.

GAIL informed fertiliser companies that long-term RLNG quantities would henceforth be invoiced at multiple price points, including contract price, GAIL Pooled Price and Gazette Pooled Price, effective 1 March.

The pooled price is provisional and subject to retrospective reconciliation under applicable government guidelines, introducing an additional layer of financial uncertainty for producers already absorbing production losses.

India is among the world's largest consumers of urea, and a sustained domestic shortfall could affect fertiliser availability ahead of the upcoming kharif sowing season.

India now has a total urea stock of 61.14 lakh tonne.—*PTI*

Disruptions have also placed pressure on energy markets and trade, affecting both imports and exports —*PTI*

Firms face shipment delays amid Iran war

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Indian companies are facing disruptions ranging from shipment delays to shortages of key raw materials due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said on Sunday.

CII director general Chandrajit Banerjee said firms are already seeing "downstream effects" as the conflict disrupts key maritime routes and tightens global supply chains.

Disruptions have also placed pressure on energy markets and trade, affecting both imports and exports, with ripple-effects being felt across manufacturing and other industries.

Despite emerging challenges, CII underscored that India is better placed than in the past to absorb external shocks.

Banerjee said the country entered this phase "from a position of strength", supported by structural reforms and the government's push for Atmanirbhar Bharat, which has strengthened domestic resilience.

The industry lobby said the government's response has been "quick, calibrated and continuous", with measures, including crude oil diversification, maximisation of LPG production, export facilitation and currency stabilisation.

According to CII, the Indian industry is adapting to the shocks by accelerating energy diversification, optimising supply chains and protecting jobs.

CII also highlighted the importance of ongoing investments in renewable energy, green hydrogen, biofuels, and energy efficiency, calling them strategic imperatives to reduce vulnerability to geopolitical energy shocks.

While the situation remains challenging, we are confident that the government's approach, combined with its partnership-driven engagement with all stakeholders, will help India withstand this shock and preserve its forward-economic momentum, Banerjee stated.

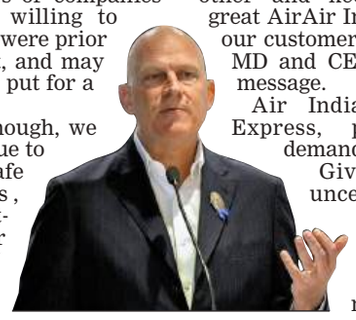
The industry lobby observed that the challenge is significant but so is India's capacity to respond proactively, securing all its interests. —*PTI*

Not everyone will pay high prices: AI CEO

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Air India Group's flights to the UK, Europe, and North America, are taking longer flight paths due to airspace restrictions in the region, resulting in more fuel consumption, said CEO Campbell Wilson. He added that not every customer is willing to pay higher airfares "so there is a limit to how high we can price before demand drops".

Given economic uncertainties, he said it was not certain that customers or companies would be as willing to travel as they were prior to the conflict, and may choose to stay put for a while.



"For now, though, we should continue to focus on safe operations, keep tighter-than-ever control of non-urgent or unnecessary expenditure, support each other and keep delivering great AirAir India service to our customers," Air India's MD and CEO said in the message.

Air India, Air India Express, price before demand drops".

Given economic uncertainties, he said it was not certain that customers or companies would be as willing to travel as they were prior to the conflict, and may choose to stay put for a while.

"For now, though, we should continue to focus on safe operations, keep tighter-than-ever control of conflict.

"There will be pockets of new demand, such as we're seeing on and deploying additional flights to some Europe and North America cities, but airlines in some parts are reducing some flights to contain fuel prices," he said —*PTI*

The sharp sell-off follows a February rebound, when PFIs invested Rs 22,615 cr, the highest in 17 months —*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

Foreign investors dump Rs 88,180 cr this month

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Foreign investors have pulled out Rs 88,180 crore (around USD 9.6 billion) from Indian equities this month, driven by escalating West Asia tensions, a weakening rupee, and concerns over higher crude oil prices impacting India's growth and earnings.

The sharp sell-off follows a February rebound, when FPIs invested Rs 22,615 crore—the highest in 17 months, according to NSDL data.

So far in 2026, total FPI outflows have crossed Rs 1 lakh crore. From 1 March to 20, FPIs remained net sellers daily, offloading Rs 88,180 crore, although this is below October 2024's record of Rs 94,017 crore.

Market analysts say the selling is due to global macroeconomic challenges and geopolitical uncertainty. Vaqarjaved Khan from Angel One cited Middle East tensions and potential Strait of Hormuz disruption, pushing Brent crude above USD 100 and triggering risk-off sentiment.

Himanshu Srivastava from Morningstar highlighted rising US Treasury yields as another factor, attracting capital to dollar assets and dampening emerging market sentiment.

VK Vijayakumar from Geojit noted ongoing West Asia conflict, rupee depreciation, and high crude prices as weighing on investor confidence. Sectorwise, financial services experienced significant selling, with Rs 31,831 crore offloaded by FPIs in the fortnight ending 15 March. —*PTI*

Mcap of 10 top firms erodes by Rs 1 lakh crore; HDFC Bank loses

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

The combined market valuation of five of the top-10 most-valued firms eroded by Rs 1 lakh crore last week, with HDFC Bank taking the biggest hit. Last week, the BSE Sensex dipped 30.96 points, or 0.04 per cent, and the NSE Nifty slipped 36.6 points, or 0.15 per cent.

"Markets ended the week on a largely flat note with a negative bias, reflecting underlying caution among participants. The tone remained positive during the first three sessions; however, a sharp decline on Thursday erased the gains, followed by a volatile final session," Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

While HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Bajaj Finance and Hindustan Unilever were the laggards, Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Infosys, and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) emerged as the winners.

The market valuation of HDFC Bank tumbled by Rs 56,124.48 crore to Rs 12,01,267.28 crore —*HDFC*

The combined market valuation of five of the top-10 most-valued firms eroded by Rs 1,02,771.87 crore.

HDFC Bank's valuation tumbled Rs 56,124.48 crore to Rs 12,01,267.28 crore, while Hindustan Unilever dropped Rs 18,009.62 crore to Rs 4,89,631.32 crore. Bajaj Finance lost Rs 15,338.42 crore to Rs 5,16,715.12 crore, and TCS declined Rs 7,127.63 crore to Rs 8,64,940 crore. —*PTI*

West Asia conflict, crude prices to impact markets this week

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Developments related to the ongoing conflict in West Asia and its impact on crude oil prices will continue to rule investors' sentiment in a holiday-shortened week ahead, analysts said.

Besides, trends in global markets, trading activity of foreign investors and rupee-dollar movement would also drive momentum in equities.

Stock markets would remain closed on Thursday for Shri Ram Navami.

"This week is expected to remain data-sensitive amid ongoing global uncertainties. Developments in the West Asia conflict and movements in crude oil prices will continue to act as key external drivers and are likely to dictate the near-term market trend.

"On the domestic front, investors will closely monitor HSBC Flash PMI data for manufacturing, services, and composite segments, which will provide an early indication of trends of business activity in the markets," Ajit Mishra -- SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. —*PTI*

Sebi board to consider easing of FPI norms

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Markets regulator Sebi board is set to meet on Monday to deliberate on a wide-ranging agenda, including a proposal to ease fund settlement norms for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), and changes to regulatory frameworks for market intermediaries, people familiar with the matter said.

A key item on the agenda is a proposal to allow Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) to net funds for same-day cash market trades, instead of settling each trade individually.

Under the existing framework, an FPI needs to settle equity cash market trades on a gross basis, funding each purchase transaction independently of any sale transactions, even on the same day.

Sebi has proposed permitting "netting of funds", which would allow FPIs to use proceeds from same-day sales to offset purchase obligations, thereby requiring them to meet only the net payable amount. It will enhancing operational efficiency and reduce funding cost. —*PTI*

TO ADDRESS SUPPY DISRUPTIONS

Ethanol firms lobby for 20% blend in petrol

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

With crude oil prices rising, the All India Distillers' Association (AIDA) has offered to supply ethanol blends exceeding 20 per cent with petrol, saying the move could proportionally reduce India's dependence on imported crude oil.

In a letter to Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, AIDA deputy director general Bharati Balaji said the ethanol industry was prepared to go beyond the E20 target already achieved by the country.

"Now with the Middle East entangled in a war and oil prices having started increasing, ...," she said in the letter.

She said such a step will mitigate supply disruptions and adverse economic impact on the country.

India achieved its E20 ethanol blending target -- mixing 20 per cent ethanol with petrol -- ahead of schedule in 2025, a goal set under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration to cut fuel import bills and reduce emissions.

India achieved its E20 ethanol blending target in 2025 to cut fuel import bills and reduce emissions —*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

- In a letter to Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways AIDA deputy director general Bharati Balaji said the ethanol industry was prepared to go beyond the E20 target.

The association has demanded that the government raise the ethanol blending mandate gradually from 20 to 30 per cent.

Among other demands, AIDA has called for introduction of flex-fuel vehicles capable of running on 100 per cent ethanol on the lines of Brazil, promotion of ethanol-based cook stoves for domestic and commercial use, and exploration of ethanol blending in diesel to contain costs.

The industry body said ethanol-based cooking solutions could serve as a clean energy option, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas, aligning with national priorities on clean energy access and reduced indoor air pollution.

India's ethanol sector now has a cumulative production capacity of around 2,000 crore litres, with more than 380 dedicated distilleries operational and a further 33 in the pipeline. —*PTI*

'Indian firms lead AI adoption despite skills gap'

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Indian enterprises are outpacing their global counterparts in terms of large-scale adoption of artificial intelligence, a report by Deloitte said.

However, this rapid deployment contrasts with a significant capability gap, as India reports lower levels of specialist AI expertise compared to the global average.

"40 per cent of Indian respondents report significant or full usage, compared with a global average of approximately 28 per cent, indicating that Indian organisations are increasingly operationalising it to unlock near-term productivity and business outcomes," Deloitte's 'State of AI in the Enterprise' report for 2026 stated.

The report noted that 94 per cent of Indian organisations expect their AI budgets to increase over the next year.

Only 0 to 4 per cent of Indian companies possess a high level of AI expertise, lagging behind the global average of 2 to 8 per cent.

4-5 per cent of companies have a high level of Ai expertise —*AI*

The report lists regulatory and compliance demands as the leading obstacle for AI integration (39 per cent), followed by resistance to change (34 per cent).

Organisations report relatively lower pressure from cost (12 per cent) and infrastructure (5 per cent) constraints, indicating that governance readiness and operating-model change are the eliminting factors for scale. —*PTI*

-PTI

PSL will be held from March 26: PCB chairman Naqvi

LAHORE, 22 MARCH

The PCB on Sunday announced that the initial stages of the Pakistan Super League will be held without spectators due to the prevailing tense situation in the region caused by the Iran-USA-Israel conflict.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman, Mohsin Naqvi, said it had also been decided that the latest PSL edition will be restricted to two venues Karachi and Lahore. "The PSL is an international brand and our pride. So, the league will be held on schedule from 26th March, but no spectators will be allowed," Naqvi told a media conference here. However, Naqvi, flanked by PSL CEO Salman Naseer, downplayed any security concerns about holding the PSL in Pakistan.—*PTI*

Duplantis wins 4th world indoor pole vault title

TORUN, 22 MARCH

Armand Duplantis won another pole vault world title after he was pushed all the way by Greece's Emmanouil Karalis. Duplantis won his fourth consecutive world indoor championships with a tournament-record vault of 6.25 meters, a 10-centimeter improvement on his winning height from a year ago in Nanjing. The pair left the field at 6.05. Duplantis cleared his first attempts at 6.10, 6.15, and then 6.25, when he wobbled the bar. Karalis passed at 6.10 and 6.15, and missed his attempts at 6.25, finishing runner-up for a second straight year. —*PTI*

'They bully me, I bully them back': Atiqa Mir

DUBAI, 22 MARCH

India's 11-year-old Formula 1 hopeful, Atiqa Mir, has surpassed expectations in her first year of karting in the 12-14 age category on the highly competitive European circuit, according to a release.

Racing remains a male-dominated sport, and boys older than Atiqa often try to "bully" her on the track. With special talent and ability on her side, the first Indian to be backed by the Formula 1 Academy doesn't shy away from "bullying" them back in a wheel-to-wheel battle. Fast-tracked into the OKN-J (Junior) category (age 12-14) from mini (8-12), considering her special talent, Atiqa has attracted plenty of attention in the paddock with her sizzling speed.—*PTI*

-PTI

Josh Kerr regains world indoor 3,000m gold

POLAND, 22 MARCH

Britain's Josh Kerr regained the 3,000 metres title at the World Indoor Championships in Poland on Saturday, taking Britain's first medal of the tournament as he surged past American Cole Hocker and France's Yann Schrub in the final metres to win in 7:35.56. Kerr, who was beaten by Hocker in the 1,500m at the Paris Olympics, was racing for only the second time since a calf injury suffered during his world 1,500m title defence in Tokyo last September. He stayed patient early on in the fifth before moving into third with two laps remaining as he tracked Ethiopia's Addisu Yihune and Getnet Wale. He hit the front at the bell to force the pace, and although Schrub and Hocker closed late, neither could reel him in.—*PTI*

PBKS are moving in the right direction: Pathan

Leadership has played a huge role in Punjab's turnaround

NEW DELHI, 22 MARCH

Former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan says Punjab Kings are finally "moving in the right direction" after making smart and bold choices at the auction table, raising hopes of ending their long wait for an Indian Premier League title.

Speaking on 'IPL Today Live', Pathan credited Punjab's improved clarity in leadership and squad-building for their turnaround. Punjab finished as runner-up last season, losing the close final to Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

"Leadership has played a huge role in Punjab's turnaround. You win half the IPL at the auction table. Big purses don't necessarily mean you will always get what you want, but they did, and they reached the final," he said.

Pathan pointed out that the franchise has not shied away from taking tough calls, including releasing underperforming players such as Glenn Maxwell, while also strengthening their bench.

"They took bold but important calls... and now you see all-rounders like Azmatullah Omarzai, Marco Jansen and Marcus Stoinis, along with a young Indian batting core. They also went all-out for Shreyas Iyer after deciding he would be the captain. There is clarity of thought, and I feel Punjab have started to move in the right direction," he said.

LSG skipper Pant to bat at three

Lucknow Super Giants captain Rishabh Pant is set to bat at number three in a potentially make-or-break IPL season beginning on 28 March.

Stakes are high for Pant going into the second season as LSG skipper with the franchise having shelled out a record Rs 27 crore for his services at the 2025 mega auction.

Following the disappointment of last year, a successful season as a leader as well as a top-order batter can make him part of India's T20 plans going forward.

The 28-year-old lost his place in the T20 side following India's World Cup triumph in 2024. It would need to do something special to make a comeback, considering Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan have made themselves automatic picks by the sheer weight of their recent performances.

Shanaka set to join Rajasthan Royals

In yet another blow to the Pakistan Super League, Sri Lanka captain and all-rounder Dasun Shanaka is set to join the Rajasthan Royals as a replacement for the injured Sam Curran in the upcoming Indian Premier League. The move will make Shanaka the latest player to switch from the PSL to the IPL after Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani pulled out of his contract with Islamabad United to join Kolkata Knight Riders as a replacement for Mustafizur Rahman.

"Dasun's signing is pending owing to his paperwork in the PSL, which is a formality. He is likely to join the squad in Guwahati," a team source told PTI. RR will begin their campaign against Chennai Super Kings in Guwahati, their home venue, in the first phase of the IPL schedule that has been announced so far. —*PTI*

LEVEL SERIES 2-2

Spinners shine as SA beat New Zealand by 19 runs

WELLINGTON, 22 MARCH

New Zealand foundered against South Africa's spinners as the Proteas won the fourth Twenty20 by 19 runs Sunday to level the five-match series at 2-2.

Connor Esterhuizen made a maiden half-century from 33 balls as South Africa scored 164-5 after choosing to bat. Esterhuizen eventually was out for 57, and his innings made the difference between the teams.

New Zealand was ahead at 63-2 after the power play, with Tim Robinson making 32 from 22 balls at the top of the order. But left-armer Prenelan Subrayen took 2-13 on debut, and Keshav Maharaj took 2-22 to cut through the New Zealand middle order and turn the match in South Africa's favor.

Dane Cleaver made 26 from 16 balls, returning to the New Zealand lineup after almost three years. He looked dangerous when he was beaten and bowled by a Subrayen delivery. Bevon Jacobs was also bowled by Subrayen when the ball dipped under his bat.

Jimmy Neesham (10) was dropped twice, then caught in the same over from Ottneil Baartman, who took 2-30 from four overs.

Maharaj removed Nick Kelly (16) and Cole McConchie (10) as the spinners pinned down the New Zealand batters by varying their pace and flight.

"I thought a total of 164 was about par, maybe a bit below par," New Zealand captain Jimmy Neesham said. "We certainly had a chance going into the second half of the game.

"A few average options and poor execution, and we came out on the wrong side of it."

New Zealand's already depleted lineup was further reduced by the loss of Tom Latham to injury and Devon Conway, Mitchell Santner, and Lockie Ferguson for the last two matches of the series.

Esterhuizen rallied South Africa after it had lost Wiaan Mulder to the second ball of its innings, a maiden bowled by Kyle Jamieson.

South Africa 164 for 5 (Esterhuizen 57, Jamieson 2-29) beat New Zealand 145 (Robinson 32, Coetzee 3-31, Subrayen 2-13, Maharaj 2-22, Baartman 2-30) by 19 runs. —*PTI*

India tour to test Australia as CA unveils gruelling 2026-27 schedule

MELBOURNE, 22 MARCH

Cricket Australia on Sunday unveiled its 2026-27 international calendar with a packed itinerary leaving little turnaround time ahead of the marquee Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India, expected to begin in mid or late-January.

The five-Test away series against India next year is set to be a decisive phase in an unprecedented and taxing schedule for Pat Cummins' ageing side.

Australia are slated to play 10 Tests in a 14-week window between December and March, making it one of the most demanding stretches in their history.

The home season will commence in August 2026, with two Tests against Bangladesh and conclude in March 2027 with a day-night spectacle at the MCG the 150th anniversary Test against England.

The home series against New Zealand has been squeezed into a window of just over four weeks, while Australia's tour of South Africa later this year runs until the end of October, followed by an eight-match white-ball series against England in November.

"That Border-Gavaskar Trophy tour, a final frontier for the likes of Cummins, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon, who have never won a series in India. —*PTI*

AUSTRALIA'S TEST SCHEDULE

- **AUGUST:** Two Tests vs Bangladesh (home)
- **OCTOBER:** Three Tests vs South Africa (away)
- **DECEMBER-JANUARY:** Four Tests vs New Zealand (home)
- **JANUARY-MARCH:** Five Tests vs India (away)
- **MARCH 11-15:** 150th anniversary Test vs England (home)
- **JUNE:** WTC final (if qualified, England)
- **JUNE-AUGUST:** Five Tests vs England (away)

BREACHES CWG QUALIFICATION MARK

Sajan Prakash wins silver in 200m butterfly

SINGAPORE, 22 MARCH

Indian swimmer Sajan Prakash delivered a strong performance to clinch the silver medal in the men's 200m butterfly at the Singapore National Age Group Swimming Championships on Sunday breaches CWG qualification mark in Singapore.

Sajan clocked 1:57.09s in the final, finishing second behind Chinese Taipei's Kuan Hung-Wang, who took gold with a time of 1:56.18s.

In addition to his podium finish, Sajan also achieved the Commonwealth Games qualification standard set by the Swimming Federation of India, going under the mark of 1:57.12 in the event.

A two-time Olympian, Sajan became the first Indian swimmer to qualify for the Olympics through the 'A' standard when he made the cut for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

He has also been a multiple-time medallist at the South Asian Games and a national record holder (1:56:38) in the 200m butterfly. —*PTI*

Aditi falls out of top 5

MENLO PARK, 22 MARCH

Indian golfer Aditi Ashok slipped down the five leaderboard to Tied-24 from Tied-3 after carding 1-over 73 on the third day of the Fortinet Founders Cup, here.

Hyo Joo Kim extended her lead; she is now five strokes clear of her closest rival with just one day left to be played.

Kim fired off a round of 6-under 66 to increase the gap to her rivals. Kim is chasing her eighth LPGA title this week and her first of the season.

The win in California this week would help her move into the second spot on the CME ranking. Her 54-hole score stands at 17-under par. —*PTI*

Anahat crowned Indian Open 2026 champion

NUH, 22 MARCH

Anahat Singh capped off a brilliant run at the ongoing Indian Open 2026 with a four-set win over Egypt's Hana Moataz to claim the women's singles title, whereas India's No. 1 Abhay Singh defeated compatriot Veer Chotrani to win the men's title.

Anahat dominated the first two games before Moataz fought back to take the third, forcing a fourth. The top seed regained control to seal the match 11-5, 11-6, 9-11, 11-6 and clinch the championship.

Following her Squash on Fire Open title in Washington, Anahat reached a career-high world ranking of No. 19 in February 2026. As of mid-March 2026, she continues to hold a place inside the top 20.

"The way she actually played recently was amazing. She has a certain type of game that some girls really struggle with. She's really surprising, gifted, talented, and skilful.

The second-youngest Indian to win a medal at the Asian Games, Anahat won in the 2022 Asian Games and had a successful run of form in 2025 by winning a bronze at the World Junior Squash Championships, ending India's 15-year medal drought at the event. —*PTI*

-PTI

MIAMI OPEN 2026

Gauff fights back to enter fourth round

MIAMI, 22 MARCH

Fourth-seeded Coco Gauff led the way into the women's fourth round, roaring back for a 3-6, 6-0, 6-1 victory over fellow American Alycia Parks on Sunday.

Teenagers Mirra Andreeva and Victoria Mboko booked a last-16 meeting that will be their third clash of the WTA season.

Eighth-seeded Russian Andreeva defeated Czech Marie Bouzkova 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, while 10th-seeded Canadian Mboko downed Russian qualifier Anastasia Zakharova 6-1, 7-5.

Andreeva, 18, and 19-year-old Mboko have split their last two matches, Andreeva winning in the final at Adelaide in January before Mboko sent her packing in the third round at Doha -- saving a match point in the three-set win and going on to reach the final.

Sinner and Jakub Mensik advance to 3rd round

Worldnumber two Jannik Sinner made a smooth start Saturday at the Miami Open, where defending champion Jakub Mensik shook off a "horrible" first set to win his opening match. Six days after he lifted the Indian Wells trophy, Sinner launched his pursuit of tennis' "Sunshine Double" in confident style with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over 76th-ranked Damir Dzumhur. "First-round matches are never easy," said the 24-year-old Italian, who won the 2024 Miami crown. After beating Daniil Medvedev for his first Indian Wells title, Sinner is trying to become the first to sweep the Indian Wells and Miami ATP Masters 1000 titles since Roger Federer in 2017. —*PTI*

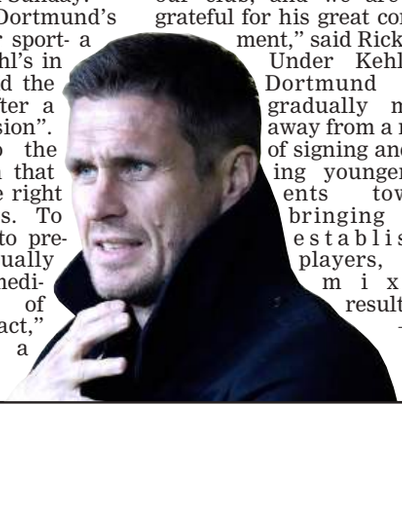
Borussia parts ways with sporting director Kehl

DORTMUND, 22 MARCH

Borussia Dortmund sporting director Sebastian Kehl has ended his tenure "by mutual consent", the club said in a statement released Sunday.

Lars Ricken, Dortmund's board member for sport- a position above Kehl's in the hierarchy- said the decision came after a "very open discussion".

"(We) came to the shared conclusion that the summer is the right time for changes. To allow both sides to prepare, we mutually agreed to an immediate termination of Sebastian's contract," Ricken said in a statement.

After retiring in 2015, Kehl joined the club in a player management role before taking over as sporting director in 2022. "Sebastian has made an enormous contribution to our club, and we are very grateful for his great commitment," said Ricken.

Under Kehl, 46, Dortmund has gradually moved away from a model of signing and selling younger talents towards bringing in established players, with mixed results. —*PTI*